READERS' Q&A

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MOTORSPORT NEWS

■ APRIL 15 2021 ■ EVERY THURSDAY ■ £3.99 ■ FORMERLY MOTORING NEWS

The man who launched 100s of careers is quizzed by the MN readers p14

Altered government advice locks spectators out of Britain's tracks for another five weeks

CIRCUIT BOSSES' FURY AS FANS ARE BLOCKED UNTIL MID-MAY

Fans have to wait to be trackside

By Matt James

The chiefs of MotorSport Vision, which runs five leading UK motorsport venues, have expressed anger at the latest government instructions dictating that fans will be barred from going trackside until May 17.

Initially, the roadmap from Whitehall said that non-elite sports, such as national racing, would be opened up in Step Two of the plan, which was implemented on Monday this week (April 12). However, new guidance has been issued which means MSV's five tracks – Brands Hatch, Cadwell Park, Donington Park, Oulton Park and Snetterton – will not be able to welcome spectators until May 17.

An MSV statement read: "Whilst outdoor attractions like zoos and theme parks can reopen, and events such as boot fairs, steam rallies and food festivals can take place with up to 4000 visitors per day, a specific ban has been applied to spectators at sport events – even at grassroots level.

"MSV is incredibly disappointed by this development. The UK government is now actively encouraging people to get outside and enjoy the fresh air, and circuit venues are by their very nature wide-open spaces like parks, with ample room to enable social distancing across dozens of spectator viewing areas."

Full story, page 5

THE VOICE OF BRITISH MOTORSPORT

MOTORSPORT NEWS

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Why Perry Cooke is turning heads in Hot Rod racing p20

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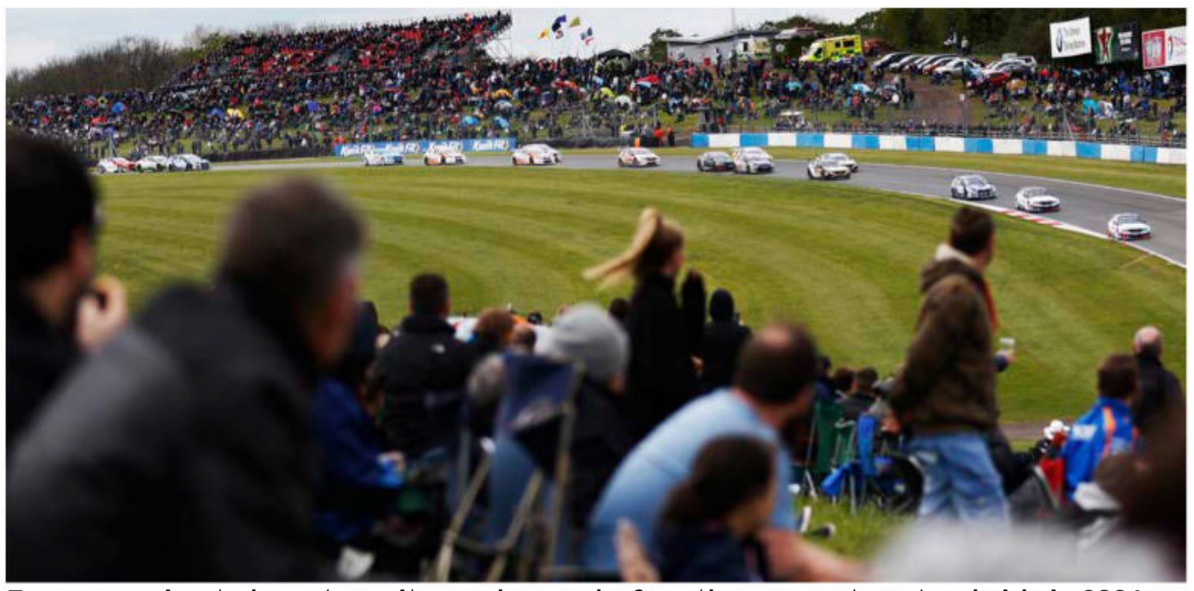
COMMENT

Photo: Motorsport Images, mkpics.net, Jakob Ebrey, FIA



Fans are going to have to wait even longer before they can return trackside in 2021

BAFFLING RULES FOR UK TRACKS

On the whole, the Great British public has coped well with the restrictions and limitations that have been placed on it by those in power to help get through the disruptions of the health pandemic.

Freedoms have been taken away at a stroke, and the light at the end of the tunnel seemed a long way away when lockdown three began in December. But there is some hope, and reason to be cheerful. The government's roadmap to signpost us all out of the dark times has been welcomed, and the days are being ticked off until some form of normality can return.

However the latest advice, issued as MN closed for press last week, is an unnecessary and unwelcome hammer blow to this country's motorsport venues. The news that crowds will not be allowed at non-elite sports – which encompasses national racing – until May 17 is not only disappointing, as MSV chiefs have pointed out, it is also unfathomable.

If you want to queue up and climb on to a roller coaster, then you may. If you want to go and tickle your taste buds at a food festival, you may do that too. But you will not be allowed to go to a track, standing well away from any other spectators in the vast acreage afforded by each circuit and enjoy motorsport. Compare the area available for spectating at a race track to a football stadium, for example. A race track is probably one of the perfect places to allow fans to return.

But no, those in Whitehall have either missed the point or shown that they don't actually understand what national racing is. MSV and the other track operators in this country are desperate to get some kind of revenue stream back. They don't run on fresh air, and there are still costs to be met even when the gates are locked. It is hard not to feel sorry for venue operators, who have probably been hit hardest of all by the extended period of inactivity.

Elsewhere in this issue, we catch up with the legendary boss of junior single-seater constructor Van Diemen, Ralph Firman. He is a man who has been at the heart of national racing since 1973 and is still turning his hand to fine-tuning Kent-engined machines.

Graham Brown catches up with Perry Cooke, which is a hard thing for his rivals to do on the short ovals as the young National Hot Rod star is forging quite a reputation. Luke Barry looks back over VW's history in British rallying, while Jimmy Roberts is our guide as we explore the fan-friendly new-for-2022 Formula 1 regulations.

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MOTORSPORT NEWS

ISSUE MJ3278 APRIL 15 2021

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IN BRIEF

Allison's new role

Mercedes F1 has confirmed that Brit James Allison will move to the role of chief technical offer from July, and his position as technical director will be taken by the current technology director, Mike Elliott. Elliott has experience at Renault and McLaren and joined the Brackley-based team in 2012. Allison said: "I believe that people have a shelf life in senior roles in this sport, and I have chosen to step away from my role as technical director in order to pass on the baton at the right time for the organisation and myself."

Max's woe revealed

Red Bull's advisor Helmut Marko has revealed that Bahrain Grand Prix runner-up Max Verstappen was losing 0.3s per lap in the early stages with a differential problem and then the team had to restrict the power to the Honda engine in the closing stages due to overheating. "We were handicapped in the first stages," said Marko. "Then we had to turn the engine down." Verstappen finished 0.7s behind winner Lewis Hamilton.

Paffett back to DTM

Champion Gary Paffett will return to the revamped GT3-based DTM this season as part of Mercedes' seven-strong driver line up. Paffett, who claimed the crown in 2005 and again in 2018, will race for Mucke Motorsport. Paffett is joined in the Mercedes fold by Maximilian Gotz, Vincent Abril, Lucas Auer, Philip Ellis, Daniel Juncadella and Arjun Maini. The DTM will get underway at Monza in Italy on June 19-20.

Lynn is re-United

Briton Alex Lynn has joined the United Autosports line-up for Le Mans this year and will partner Paul di Resta in the team's ORECA 07-Gibson. A third driver for the car has yet to be announced and it will be part of a three-strong crew for United Autosports. Lynn won the LMGTE Pro division at La Sarthe last year with Aston Martin, while di Resta and United claimed the LMP2 spoils. This year's Le Mans takes place on August 21-22.

JEV is back

Two-time Formula E champion Jean-Eric Vergne opened his points account in the first ePrix in Rome on Saturday with a victory. The DS Techeetah man, a British Formula 3 champion, overtook leader Lucas di Grassi when the Audi Sport Abt driver's car broke its driveshaft and caused a pile-up behind. Brit Sam Bird claimed second for Jaguar. The second event was won by Mercedes man Stoffel Vandoorne, ahead of the Mahindra of Brit Alex Sims. Bird leads the points after the four races so far.

TEAMS' DEAL MEANS F1 SPRINT RACES ARE NEARING SIGN-OFF FOR 2021

Extra finance for grand prix squads paves the way for radical race weekend shake-up

By Matt James

Saturday Formula 1 sprint races will be introduced in 2021 after squads and F1's bosses reached a financial agreement to allow the 60-mile events to take place.

Teams were concerned that the new plan for three extra sprints would impact on their finances, particularly as they are all trying to adhere to new cost-capping measures.

A deal has now been struck to grant extra cash to each team. Although it has not been confirmed, it is thought that each will receive $500,000 to cover the costs of the new sprint events.

There are measures in place to raise the individual cost caps should a particular squad incur a burden if one of its cars was involved in a major crash during the extra events. The races will take place at Silverstone on July 17, Monza on September 11 and at Interlagos in Brazil on November 6. The races will be fought out for a yet-to-be determined number of points and will set the grid for Sunday.

Before the deal was finalised, Red Bull team boss Christian Horner said the plans need to be thought through amid the push to reduce budgets across Formula 1.

"There just has to be a sensible allowance that takes [the budget cap] into account, because we're chasing £10,000, £20,000, £30,000 savings to ensure that we're hitting the cap," he said. "To suddenly have a variable like this [sprint races] is something that just needs to be [taken into account]. We're keen to support it but there needs to be an accommodation."

Photos: Mototsport Images, Gary Hawkins

Monza is one of the venues that has been pencilled in for a sprint race

FOX MOTORSPORT RETURNS TO BRITISH GT WITH CHAMPION PAIR

Fox Motorsport will return to the British GT championship in 2021 with a McLaren 570S GT4 driven by Pro-Am pair British GT4 title-winner Jamie Stanley and Ginetta champion Nick Halstead.

Halstead made his competitive debut in Ginetta GT5 Challenge in 2017 and with Fox in 2018 won the series' Am division. His experience also includes TCR UK, the Citroen C1 24 Hours and Ginetta GT4 Supercup.

Lotus Cup UK Exige, GT Cup and Britcar title-winner Stanley won 2010's British GT4 championship and since has had several competitive appearances in the category. Fox also has extensive British GT experience and Fox and Stanley together won at Snetterton in 2015.

Halstead told Motorsport News: "It's been a multi-year project. My ultimate goal has always been to do British touring car but that can't happen this year. In GT racing, British GT is at the top in the UK and [I'm] a strong bronze, so the opportunity to do it with Jamie Stanley gives us a really good chance. Jamie's been my trainer right from when I started."

Halstead is aiming for overall GT4 podiums this year, which will help him towards BRDC membership: "I'm incredibly close to Jamie in terms of pace, we can compete with the Silver-Silver pairings."

TOP BRASS AT SILVERSTONE BACK COVID CERTIFICATION FOR RETURNING F1 FANS

Bosses of Silverstone have joined forces with other leading sporting bodies to back a plan for Covid certification, which would allow as many fans as possible to attend this year's British Grand Prix.

Silverstone chiefs have collaborated with nine other sporting bodies to pen the letter to Downing Street. It is asking for a clear direction "as soon as possible" to allow all parties to plan ahead.

The British motorsport venue held two grands prix last season but both were run behind closed doors to satisfy the Covid restrictions. This year's British GP is due to take place on July 16-18, after the UK's restrictions are due to have been lifted. In 2019, a reported 141,000 attended the British Grand Prix race day.

Following on from the letter, a Silverstone statement said: "While we hope there will be no restrictions on attendance at our events this summer we have, along with other venues, informed the government that we are in support of a review of Covid certification. We want to reassure fans that this is part of our contingency planning and we remain committed to running events this summer with as many spectators and as few restrictions as possible."

Four-time British touring car title-winner Colin Turkington swapped mounts for a test at Brands Hatch last weekend when he got behind the wheel of a Legends car. The Northern Irishman says he was fascinated by the cars after watching some of the racing during lockdown and arranged a session with the Team 247 crew. "It seemed like a bit of me: all action and rear-wheel drive," said Turkington. "I've got no plans to race one, I was just curious. If I was going to take part in an event, I would need more testing first. They are challenging things to drive!"

McKENNA JOINS TOYOTA SPEEDWORKS BRITISH GT YOUNG DRIVER PROGRAMME

McKenna will benefit from scheme

Ginetta champion Scott McKenna will lead Speedworks Motorsport's 2021 British GT championship challenge as first member of the new Toyota Gazoo Racing UK Young Driver Programme.

Speedworks and Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe launched the young driver programme last month (*see MN, March 25*) and 19-year-old McKenna, as well as getting access to the organisations' expertise and resources, will pursue the British GT championship spearheading a GT4 Pro-Am line-up. He'll pilot Speedworks' Toyota GR Supra alongside Formula Ford race-winner John Ferguson.

Yorkshireman McKenna cut his car-control teeth on Scandinavia's frozen lakes through his family's ice driving business. He switched to asphalt four years ago, and was crowned 2019 Ginetta GT5 champion in his first full car racing campaign. With Le Mans winner Guy Smith's mentoring and Andy Meyrick's coaching, BRDC Rising Star McKenna last year raced in Porsche Carrera Cup GB with Redline Racing.

McKenna said: "It's never been about Formula 1 for me – GT and sportscar racing has always been where it's at in my mind, with the ultimate dream of competing at Le Mans. This is the next step on that ladder. In everything [Toyota Gazoo] turn their hand to, they succeed. Hopefully British GT will be the next box to be ticked."

SUPER-SUB NICO HULKENBERG LANDS JOB WITH ASTON MARTIN

Formula 1 refugee Nico Hulkenberg has signed with Aston Martin to be its development and reserve driver for the 2021 season

The 33-year-old was called up into the team – which was run under the Racing Point name last term – on three occasions as the regular drivers Sergio Perez and Lance Stroll were forced to miss grands prix due to Covid issues. Hulkenberg raced to a seventh-place result in the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone in August and an eighth-place finish at the Eifel GP at the Nurburgring.

The 2015 Le Mans winner said: "It's great to get this deal signed up with plenty of notice – last year, I didn't have quite as much time to prepare before jumping in the car.

"The team knows it can rely on me to step in and do an excellent job. It will also be interesting to help develop the team."

Photo: Jakob Ebrey, Gary Paravani (Xynamic)

Pembrey and Anglesey "awaiting some clarification"

No fans at tracks until at least May

MOTORSPORT VENUES FRUSTRATED AS SPECTATOR RETURN DELAYED

Fans' return to English circuits is pushed back a month to mid-May while the picture for Scottish and Welsh racing resumption and fan attendance remains unclear

By Graham Keilloh

Motorsport in England is set to take place behind closed doors until at least mid-May while the picture in Scotland and Wales for racing's resumption and spectators is less clear.

MotorSport Vision, which operates several English venues, had hoped spectators could attend non-elite events after April 12. However, while certain outdoor activities can admit up to 4000 visitors from this date, sport events now have a specific spectator ban until May 17.

An MSV statement said: "MSV is incredibly disappointed by this development. The UK government is now actively encouraging people to get outside and enjoy the fresh air, and circuit venues are by their very nature wide-open spaces like parks, with ample room to enable social distancing."

Knockhill, whose first 2021 race event is set for June 6, told Motorsport News that the Scottish Government's approach is "very cautious" and the venue's situation regarding readmitting spectators is "uncertain". Knockhill hopes for more government information "in another month or so".

The Scottish Government has however approved 12,000 people, 25% of stadium capacity, to attend Euro 2020 football matches at Hampden in June.

There has been no confirmation for Welsh racing's resumption or spectator readmission. Pembrey circuit director Phil Davies told MN it hopes to restart racing in June: "Ourselves and Anglesey [are] just awaiting some clarification, it is very frustrating. Motorsport UK is talking to the Welsh Government but it's not straightforward with them."

LE MANS STAR TURNER ADDS BRITISH GT CAMPAIGN WITH NEWBRIDGE MOTORSPORT

Three-time Le Mans winner Darren Turner will race in British GT this year in a Newbridge Motorsport Aston Martin Vantage GT4 Pro-Am partnership with category newcomer Matt Topham.

Turner contested a full British GT3 campaign with Andrew Howard and Beechdean AMR in 2018 plus made a one-off appearance with M2 Competition the following year. He now pairs with Topham who last year in his first national GT series season claimed several GT Cup class wins aboard Newbridge's Vantage GT4.

Newbridge is also starting its first-ever full-season British GT campaign following a one-off appearance at Silverstone last season. Aston works driver Turner will also race this season in GT Cup with Feathers Motor Sport, again in a Vantage GT4.

Turner said: "[British GT] is always competitive and I have no doubt 2021 will be another absolute cracker. AMR is placing even more emphasis on its customer racing programmes this year and I will do my utmost to help Matt and the team achieve their goals."

Turner returns to British GT

Rising Rawlings gets GT Cup go

RAWLINGS JOINS FLETCHER AND PLOWMAN'S GT CUP ASSAULT

Mini Challenge race-winner Tom Rawlings has completed the two-driver GT Cup 2021 line-up for the Paddock Motorsport team co-owned by British GT champions Kelvin Fletcher and Martin Plowman.

Emmerdale actor and Strictly Come Dancing winner Fletcher and LMP2 Le Mans victor Plowman's Paddock Motorsport team, having raced in Mazda MX-5 Supercup last year, expands to GT Cup's GTH class in 2021 with a pair of McLaren 570S GT4s. Rawlings joins fellow teenager Moh Ritson in the team's GT Cup line-up.

Rawlings said: "Although I've had two great years racing in the Mini Challenge, it has always been a goal of mine to drive GTs and test myself against some of the country's best drivers so to get the opportunity, especially in a McLaren, is fantastic! [The team's] desire and ambitions are beyond any I've come across."

COLLARD AND DE HAAN JOIN FORCES IN ALL-STAR RAM GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE LINE-UP

The top two finishers from last season's British GT championship will pair up in this year's GT World Challenge Endurance Cup in an all-star RAM Racing driver selection.

British Touring Car Championship race-winner Rob Collard last season took British GT's GT3 championship partnering Sandy Mitchell in a Barwell Lamborghini, plus competed in GTWCE and took third in the Pro-Am standings.

Now Collard switches to RAM to join 2020 British GT3 runner-up Sam De Haan in a Mercedes-AMG GT3.

RAM's GTWCE driving trio is completed by British GT race-winner Callum Macleod, and they will be joined by Collard's son Ricky for the Spa 24 Hours.

De Haan sampled European GT racing last year with RAM, taking a fourth place alongside Macleod in International GT Open's Red Bull Ring round. Macleod also had a technical and coaching position with RAM last year.

British GT's champion and runner-up share RAM Merc

Collard, who has tested the RAM Mercedes several times, said: "I've gotten to know RAM well, especially through racing against them last year in British GT, so I know what a class act they are. I loved the Mercedes-AMG from the first moment I sat in it. It's slightly easier than the Lamborghini was. I'm already really pleased with the pace I've shown."

Baldwin (23) strode to win and title

BALDWIN SEALS BRITISH GT ESPORTS TITLE AHEAD OF TIME

James Baldwin added a third British GT esports championship race win to his CV to secure the inaugural title with a round to spare in his Team Rocket RJN McLaren 720S.

On a wet road, polesitter Baldwin bolted into turn one at Copse ahead, while championship rival Angus Fender in his Century Motorsport BMW M6 nabbed second from Baldwin's team-mate Alex Buncombe. Buncombe fought back but made a slip at Club and fell behind Sandy Mitchell's Barwell Lamborghini Huracan whose challenge was blunted when he clipped Samir Ibraimi's GT4 Audi R8 and copped a drivethrough penalty.

Baldwin made the best pitstop of all and Buncombe's was two seconds faster than Fender's allowing Buncombe to move into second place. Fender struggled for pace in the second stint and fell away, as attention turned to a huge fight between the Aston Martin Vantages of TF Sport's Tom Canning and Team Brit's Bobby Trundley. Canning's wide Vantage hung on to fourth.

A dominant Jack McIntyre in his Zansho Rocket Simsport Porsche 718 Cayman scored a maiden, if overdue, GT4 win to keep alive his championship hopes as a ballasted Nils Naujoks in a G2 Esports BMW M4 took fourth to maintain his title lead heading to the Donington Park season-closer in a fortnight.

David Addison

RESULTS

1 James Baldwin (McLaren 720S GT3) 1h01m14.671s; 2 Alex Buncombe (McLaren 720S GT3) +22.535s; 3 Angus Fender (BMW M6 GT3); 4 Tom Canning (Aston Martin V8 Vantage GT3); 5 Bobby Trundley (Aston Martin V8 Vantage GT3); 6 Ben Green (BMW M6 GT3); 7 Sandy Mitchell (Lamborghini Huracan GT3); 8 Liam McNeilly (McLaren 720S GT3); 9 Jack McIntyre (Porsche Cayman GT4); 10 Tariq Gamil (Porsche Cayman GT4).
Class winners: Baldwin and McIntyre. **Fastest lap:** Baldwin 2m04.965s.

STANDINGS

GT3

POS	DRIVER	PTS
1	James Baldwin	93
2	Angus Fender	54
3	Ben Green	41
4	Jody Fannin	40
5	Michael O'Brien	36
6	Morgan Short	32
7	Sandy Mitchell	22
8	Alex Buncombe	22
9	Tom Canning	18
10	Bobby Trundley	14

11 Sam Neary 10; 12 Liam McNeilly 10; 13 Andrew Watson 6; 14 Jonny Adam 1; 15 Ross Gunn 1; 16 Jack Lemmer 1

GT4

POS	DRIVER	PTS
1	Nils Naujoks	67
2	Jack McIntyre	57
3	George Boothby	53
4	Moritz Lohner	28
5	Tariq Gamil	28
6	Luka Berk	25
7	Michael Kundakcioglu	22
8	Maciej Malinowski	18
9	Chris Hoeke	17
10	Samir Ibraimi	16

11 Gregor Schill 15; 12 Pierre-Olivier Cloutier 15; 13 Robbie Stapleford 12; 14 Ivan Shermetinski 11; 15 Egor Ogorodnikov 9; 16 Maxime Bathfouller 8; 17 Chris McDade 8; 18 Andreas Schwerin 8; 19 Florian Hasse 4; 20 Nils Koch 2; 21 Eamonn Murphy 1

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RACING NEWS

KING AND WEBSTER FORM NEW 2021 PORSCHE SUPERCUP ATTACK WITH TEAM PARKER

Rising star King will combine a Carrera Cup GB title defence with a step-up to international competition

Photos: Torque, Dan Bathie, Purple M Photo, Phil J Photography

By Graham Keilloh

Harry King and Josh Webster, Team Parker Racing's champion and runner-up in last year's Porsche Carrera Cup GB, will compete with the squad in this year's Formula 1-supporting Porsche Supercup.

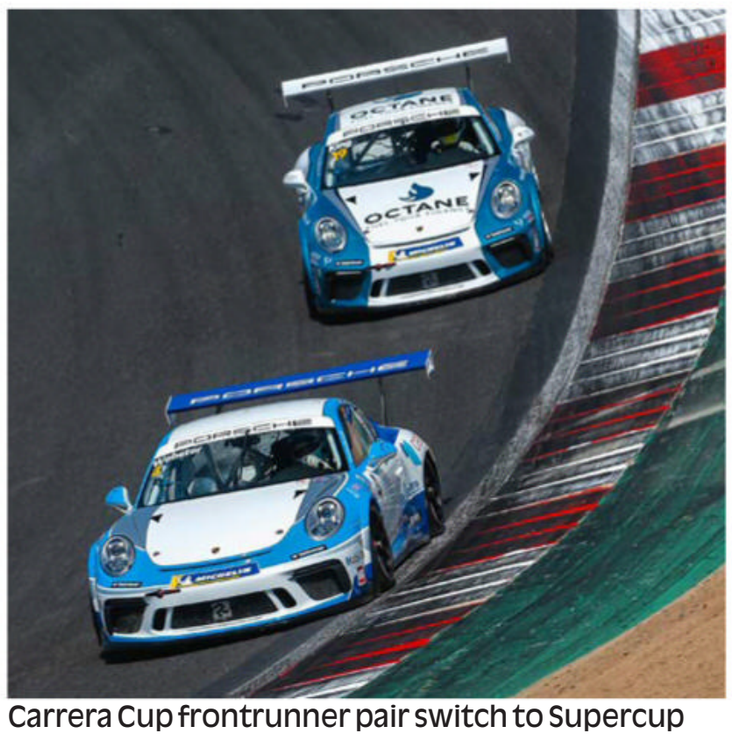
The multiple title-winning team confirmed earlier in 2021 that in partnership with Revs Motorsport it will enter a full-time two-car attack in the Supercup, which introduces the 992-shape 911 GT3 Cup this year.

Porsche Junior King last year in his debut Carrera Cup season took a dominant title, and the 20-year-old will now combine his 2021 campaign to retain his GB crown with a step-up to international competition.

Webster is 2014's Carrera GB champion and competed in Porsche Supercup full-time in 2017 and '18. He posted on Twitter last month asking for help in getting a 2021 drive, and posted again three days later that the "outpouring of support" from his initial post got him his Supercup chance.

With the confirmation of his '21 plans Webster tweeted: "Things change very quickly in life!" He added though his Supercup budget is not entirely covered and he is still seeking sponsorship.

King said of his Supercup move: "It's something I've wanted to achieve since becoming a Porsche Junior driver and is the logical step. My goal for the Supercup is obviously to be at the front and, whether it takes a few rounds or a full season, I know we'll definitely find our feet."



Carrera Cup frontrunner pair switch to Supercup

Social media post helped Webster (r) secure Supercup drive

Team launching awareness push for disabled drivers

TEAM BRIT SEEKS FUTURE STARS VIA DISABLED DRIVERS' CAMPAIGN

Team Brit is launching a campaign to encourage more disabled drivers into racing, and to potentially unearth its future driving stars, starting with a free awareness-raising online workshop next week.

The team has a racing academy plus runs a team competing in Britcar, and supports people with physical and psychological challenges in accessing motorsport. It aims to become the first all-disabled team to compete in the Le Mans 24 Hours.

The squad has created a range of materials for its campaign and hosts its workshop on Monday, April 19, at 1900hrs via Zoom. Those interested can sign up by emailing: lucy@teambrit.co.uk.

Team founder Dave Player said: "Our goal is to set up a sustainable ladder into motorsport for disabled drivers, offering everything from grassroots racing opportunities to competitive racing at the highest level.

"We've built the infrastructure to support this through our racing academy and racing team. Now, we want more people to know about the incredible opportunities out there for disabled drivers."

MITCHELL WANTING MORE AFTER STRONG COMBE BOW

Historics ace Ben Mitchell in more modern machinery made a competitive start to his Castle Combe Formula Ford 1600 campaign on Easter Monday.

Mitchell is competing in a Van Diemen RF99 raced previously by triple Combe champion Josh Fisher who is unable to participate this year.

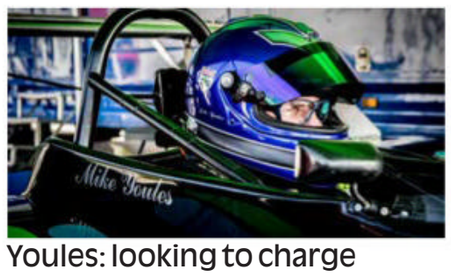
Having driven the car for the first time in Thursday's pre-event test, Mitchell bagged fourth in the first race just 3.7 seconds shy of the victor, reigning Walter Hayes Trophy winner Oli White, then finished third in race two under half a second off winner White.

Mitchell told MN: "It's a smaller operating window than something like the Merlyn [Mitchell's historic FF1600 car], in the Van Diemen you can't really afford to put a foot wrong.

"The car's very well sorted, it's just a case of getting to grips with it. And at Castle Combe particularly learning what makes a difference.

"We want to be at the sharp end and see where we pan out in the overall championship. If we can come out on top it'd be great but it's a step-by-step process."

Historics ace Mitchell was in thick of Combe action



Youles: looking to charge

LE MANS WINNER CAMPAIGNS FOR VENUE EV CHARGERS

Le Mans class winner and European Le Mans Series GT champion Mike Youles is campaigning for electric vehicle chargers to be available at motorsport venues via his comeback Clubmans racing.

Youles took 1990's Le Mans 24 Hours C2 class win and 2001's ELMS GT championship, and ended a racing sabbatical last year with appearances in the Clubmans Sports Prototype championship in Dave Beecroft's Mallock Mk 27. He started his 2021 campaign last weekend at Donington.

And while Youles' Mallock has an internal combustion engine, his effort has the backing of two organisations to promote EV charging for competitors and spectators at racing events.

Youles is supported by fast EV charger designer and supplier Sync EV, and it is joined this season by commercial energy provider Smarter Business. Their business models are that smarter energy provision derives savings to cover the cost of installing EV charging infrastructure.

CASTLE COMBE: CCRC BY MARCUS PYE — APRIL 5

ALL WHITE ON THE DAY AS WALTER HAYES VICTOR TAKES TWO WINS

Castle Combe Formula Ford was at its brilliant best on Easter Monday, a 22-car field producing superlative racing. Oli White in a Medina won both races, despite a close shave in the opener when Felix Fisher shot across his bows into Quarry's barriers.

Poleman Fisher's Ray had jinked right to avoid the gyrating Van Diemen of Ben Mitchell, who was eased onto the grass cresting Avon Rise. Alex Walker's Spectrum finished third behind defending champion Luke Cooper's Swift.

With Fisher sidelined for race two, Cooper, White, Mitchell and Walker circulated as one. Cooper repelled Mitchell for another silver behind White.

Alex Kite in an Audi TT and Simon Thornton-Norris in a Mitsubishi Colt won the Saloon bouts amid frenetic turbocharged tussling. Neil Greenland led a troubled Thornton-Norris in the opener after Kite tagged Kevin Bird's Nissan into a spin at Bobbies, but Kite struck back to win. Gary Prebble's mighty Seat Leon was stopped by a broken rear wheel in race one then broke a front driveshaft, leaving Thornton-Norris's rejuvenated Colt to top race two from Kite.

Oliver Bull in Jeremy Irwin's re-braked Vauxhall Tigra Silhouette won the opening GT race but finished seventh in race two after pitting to rake grass from its intakes following an excursion. Chris Everill's gruff Ginetta G55, missing from race one with a broken driveshaft, won. Jordan Curnow and Chris Southcott won busy Hot Hatch races, Curnow charging to third behind Tim Adams after a race-two spin.

RACE WINNERS

Formula Ford
Races 1&2: Oli White (Medina Sport JL17K)

Saloon Cars
Race 1: Alex Kite (Audi TT)
Race 2: Simon Thornton-Norris (Mitsubishi Colt Ralliart)

GT
Race 1: Oliver Bull (Vauxhall Tigra Silhouette)
Race 2: Chris Everill (Ginetta G55)

Hot Hatch
Race 1: Jordan Curnow (Honda Civic)
Race 2: Chris Southcott (Peugeot 205)

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RALLY NEWS

BREEN CAN'T SEEM TO LOSE ON SANREMO

Factory Hyundai WRC pair Craig Breen and Paul Nagle became double Rallye Sanremo winners on Sunday – but not until after their attempts to hand the victory to fellow Hyundai pair Andrea Crugnola and Pietro Ometto faltered.

Breen and Nagle completed the final stage leading by 4.8s, having gone fastest on three out of eight runs in their i20 R5.

But with Hyundai Rally Team Italia's defending champions Crugnola and Ometto needing maximum points after a troubled season opener last month, Breen and Nagle duly obliged by checking in late at the final service to earn a 10s penalty and drop to second place.

However, all penalties were subsequently cancelled after the clerk of the course determined there had been several timecard inaccuracies in the aftermath of confusion caused by the competitor relations officer advising crews to check in either early or late to ease traffic congestion in the host town.

Breen: strange way to win

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

Slip-sliding away: Move will help stages

Lack of snow has caused concerns, such as on 2020 event

MOVE FOR RALLY SWEDEN IS TIPPED TO SECURE THE EVENT'S FUTURE BEYOND 2022

Classic WRC event heads north to hunt the snow and a crucial test for runners

By Graham Lister

Rally Sweden has secured its WRC future, for the short term at least, after a move north to Umea – and the improved prospect of snow and significant sub-zero temperatures – was agreed last week.

The university city in the northeast of the country is 445 miles closer to the Arctic Circle than the rally's previous Torsby home and beat rivals Ostersund and Lulea to the job.

Event boss Glenn Olsson explained why the event was leaving the Varmland region, which has hosted Sweden's World Rally Championship round since the series' first year in 1973.

"Being able to provide historical weather data was central to the decision," he said. "Umea's strengths, in addition to a stable winter climate, include good hotel capacity in combination with service park location and HQ at the Nolia trade fair area."

Rally Sweden's deal with WRC Promoter is currently for 2022 only while "some details remain to be agreed, but both parties are confident it will be signed shortly", according to the recent announcement.

Nevertheless, confirmation of a WRC-counting Rally Sweden in 2022 ends fears that the event would lose its place to Arctic Rally Finland as the World championship's winter event following a snow-short 2020 edition.

Those concerns were escalated after a hugely successful inaugural event in Rovaniemi in late February and in light of comments from FIA president Jean Todt, who said the rally was "what we need" due to the ideal conditions experienced.

But the move to Umea has satisfied the government body, whose rally boss, Yves Matton, said: "Moving north was a must, given the challenges we experienced in the last few years. I'd like to praise the efforts of the Sweden organisers for coming up with alternatives and securing this promising new base in Umea for next year's event. It is the chance to ensure the proper winter conditions we all dream about for a snow rally."

With next year's WRC calendar unlikely to rise far above the current 12-round ceiling, the prospect of two winter rounds – something that last happened in 2007 when Sweden and Norway went back-to-back – appears slim, but not inconceivable.

However, with sources suggesting Rally Finland could switch from an early August to a late September date this year due to Covid-19 restrictions in the country, it remains to be seen whether organiser AKK Sports has the appetite to ready a second edition of Arctic Rally Finland in time.

TOYOTA'S ROVANPERA TIPPED TO HANDLE THE WRC HEAT IN CROATIA

Kalle Rovanpera can handle the pressure of being seeded number one for Croatia's first World Rally Championship event next week.

That's according to his Toyota team boss Jari-Matti Latvala, who reckons the 20-year-old Finn won't be fazed by topping the 68-car entry list as the WRC leader on the April 22-25 round.

"You can think there will be pressure being first on the road but I have a feeling he'll be very cool and calm, he can handle the pressure very well in difficult situations," Latvala told MN. "I feel positive that even though it's a new situation for him he's ready and it's also great inspiration to be leading the points standing.

"Of course, Kalle is still a young guy and still needs to collect experience so we know it can be a tough challenge coming up. But, generally, it's a great opportunity for him to see how he can make himself the lines and he doesn't need to worry about somebody putting gravel on the road for you."

Rovanpera and his Toyota team-mates Elfyn Evans, Takamoto Katsuta and Sebastien Ogier were testing in Croatia last week. All four had a day each in a Yaris WRC test car.

Rovanpera will run first

David Sutton-run Escort helped Ari Vatenen top the world

GIANT-KILLER DAVID SUTTON REMEMBERED BY THE STARS

Ari Vatanen has led the tributes to his former team boss David Sutton, who died on April 6 following a long battle with cancer.

Sutton famously oversaw Vatanen's 1981 World Rally Championship triumph in what was the first title win for a privateer team in the WRC – and the last until Sebastien Loeb won the 2006 crown for Belgium-based Kronos Racing.

From his west London base, Sutton had taken on what remained of Ford's WRC effort following the company's withdrawal from rallying at the end of 1979.

With David Richards co-driving, Vatanen took wins in Greece, Brazil and Finland during a giant-killing season in their Rothmans-backed Ford Escort RS 1800 Mk2.

"David's trust in me had finally paid off," Vatanen wrote on Facebook when recalling the moment that he became World champion on the 1981 RAC Rally. "It was a real David and Goliath operation [and] spirit made up for what we lacked materially. David lived and breathed rallying. He was optimistic and his contagious smile disarmed you. David was a warm character because he believed it could be done.

"With David's and Hannu's [Mikkola] close departures we witness the end of a golden era."

In an interview on WRC.com, Richards said: "It was his name above the door and he had his arms around every aspect of the operation. The 1981 season was a true David and Goliath story."

Having beaten Audi during the 1981 WRC season, Sutton's team became synonymous with running the German cars in the British championship for Stig Blomqvist, Hannu Mikkola and Michele Mouton.

Mikkola's victory on the 25th anniversary London to Mexico Rally was in a Sutton-prepared Escort, while the team also enjoyed success in the Middle East Rally Championship.

Martin Rowe, who took the Production World Rally Championship title in 2003 in a Sutton-run Subaru Impreza, wrote on Facebook: "Thanks for an amazing opportunity and some very special memories."

SUNINEN RESCUED BY M-SPORT WITH WRC2 DRIVE AS FOURMAUX STEPS UP

Teemu Suninen will step back to the WRC2 championship on the upcoming Croatia Rally.

The Finn's M-Sport Ford World Rally Team-run Fiesta WRC ride has gone to Adrien Fourmaux for the Zagreb event, leaving Suninen to look elsewhere for a seat.

But M-Sport has come to his rescue, effectively handing him Frenchman Fourmaux's Fiesta R5 MkII.

"I want to say a big thank you to the team for finding a way for me to compete [in] Croatia," said Suninen. "It's an event that wasn't on my calendar at the start of the year, and the more time we get behind the wheel the better.

"WRC2 is really competitive at the moment. I've not driven one of those cars for a long time, but it will be a good experience – discovering new stages, and also rediscovering a car without centre differential; so that I'm ready for any 2022 testing that might be needed in the coming months."

Suninen's last outing in a Rally2 car was on the South Estonia Rally in August 2020 when he finished sixth in class.

Swede Tom Kristensson will partner Suninen in M-Sport's WRC2 line-up with Briton Gus Greensmith competing in the Cumbria team's second Fiesta WRC.

Suninen will take the controls of M-Sport's WRC2 motor

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RALLY NEWS

IN BRIEF

New season begins

The first rally of 2021 will take place this Saturday (April 17) in the form of the Get It Sideways Stages at Down Ampney. Organised by Cheltenham Motor Club, the event will offer around 50 stage miles with the Skodarus of Rob Dennis – who won the Cotswold Stages at Down Ampney in October – and Paul Wedgbury, rallycross convert Jack Thorne (Hyundai i20 R5) and 2019 winner Wayne Lloyd (Ford Escort Mk2) among the leading contenders.

Two Greystoke rallies

Organisers of the Greystoke Stages announced last week that the event would be postponed from July 4 to September 19, but only because organising clubs had been offered the chance to run a second event. A statement read: "Given that there's been limited forest rallying in recent months then the consideration to run two events this summer is seen as a great opportunity." The new event is expected to be different to the traditional Greystoke Stages, with details to be announced soon.

Retson returns to JBRC

Finlay Retson has been tempted by the Junior BRC Hyundai WRC2 prize drive for 2021, returning to the series in a Ford Fiesta Rally4. He said: "With the World championship prize drive on offer, it is a no-brainer going for the title again. We had looked further afield but it makes a lot of sense to come back and be the best of the Juniors this season. The addition of the Grampian [Forest Stages] is superb, it's one of my favourite ever events."

Retson (r): back in the BRC

McGONIGLE READY TO DO BATTLE IN "FRANTIC" BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Irish battler plots a return to the mainland and expects a tough battle for glory

Photos: M-Sport, Jakob Ebrey

McGonigle wants to test himself against the UK's best

By Luke Barry

Joe McGonigle has said the calendar of events and the opportunity to do more gravel rallies are what persuaded him to register for this year's British Rally Championship.

McGonigle hasn't competed in the BRC since 2013 in a Renault Clio R3 while that year's Wales Rally GB was his last gravel rally other than the M-Sport Return to Rally Stages last August.

Driving a Ford Fiesta Rally2, McGonigle was competitive in Greystoke despite it being his first time on gravel for seven years, but he expects the strong pace in the BRC to a step forward for him year.

He said: "The likes of Matt Edwards, Tom Cave and Osian [Pryce] if they all go [into the championship], they'll be very, very fast. I think Matt if he found the funds to be in WRC2 he'd be at the front of WRC as well. And we've seen Tom Cave in Finland, he did an amazing job there.

"It's one of those things: you can go and do a national rally in Ireland and drive at 90% and win and then you go and do a Tarmac event and everything steps forwards. The BRC is the same. Everybody tries a lot harder and takes bigger risks."

McGonigle, who admitted he's been put off by the cost of the BRC in the past, is impressed with the calendar which is far more cost effective than in previous years as he is a fan of the compact itinery when competitors will recce on Friday and then rally on Saturday.

He added: "I wanted to go back to Wales, to me that's where the best stages in Britain are, but at the same time I've done the Trackrod Rally and I really enjoyed it and Grampian actually looks very good, I watched some in-car of it, proper stages up there. And even Oulton Park will be brilliant! It might be a bit shit for the navigators but Oulton Park should be good enough to drive around."

AMBITIOUS MELLORS IN FIGHTING MOOD FOR 2021 SEASON

Ollie Mellors feels the 2021 rallying season represents "unfinished business" for him and the Proton Iriz R5 after his planned British Rally Championship last year was curtailed by coronavirus.

Mellors – whose family Mellors Elliot Motorsport concern has developed the Proton – won four rallies on the bounce in late 2019 before stepping up to the BRC in 2020, finishing fourth on the Cambrian Rally.

Mellors told MN: "Last year was hopefully going to be a good year for us. [On] the Cambrian Rally, we had a few issues – we finished the car the night before and everything else. This year [it's] definitely unfinished business. I know the car's better, I know I'm better, so I'm going to be trying as hard as possible to prove what we can do.

"Obviously we've done a couple of tests last year with Pontus [Tidemand] and what have you so we know the car's running well, so we're just going to go for it. Whatever we end up doing we're just going to put 110% into."

While Mellors hasn't fully committed to any given series yet, he says he would consider entering the entire BRC season as the calendar looks favourable.

"Nicky Grist I've done before, Trackrod Rally I've done before, Ulster we've done too," he added. "It's just thrown us a little bit with Oulton Park [but] I'm sure they'll make a good event of it."

Mellors: Proton Iriz man

Organisers of Rally Poland are planning to celebrate the 100-year history of the event

POLAND BOSSES READY TO MARK A CENTURY OF THE EVENT'S HISTORY

Rally Poland organisers are marking the event's 100th anniversary with a return to its spiritual Warsaw home.

Although the European Rally Championship qualifier – which is scheduled as round two of the season from June 18-20 – will be based in Mikolajki, a three-hour drive north of the Polish capital, the final stage, a street-based superspecial, and finishing ceremony are set to take place in Warsaw. The first Rally Poland started in the city on July 23, 1921 and finished there following a 357-mile route.

The event is the opening round of the revamped ERC Junior contest for Rally3 cars.

LUKYANUK WANTS TO MAKE HISTORY WITH EUROPEAN ATTACK

Alexey Lukyanuk will attempt to become only the fourth driver in history to win the European Rally Championship three times.

Only Kajetan Kajetanowicz, Luca Rossetti and Sobieslaw Zasada are triple winners, but Russian Lukyanuk is in contention to emulate them after re-signing for the French Sainteloc Racing team as an official Citroen driver.

"It should be an exciting year," said the 40-year-old St Petersburg resident. "I believe it will be very strong competition with very strong drivers."

Briton Chris Ingram beat Lukyanuk to the 2019 ERC title, while serious injury in a testing crash wrecked Lukyanuk's 2017 title bid.

EURO RUNNER LAUNCHES SCHEME TO OFFSET RALLYING EMISSIONS

European championship contender Yoann Bonato is doing his bit for the environment by launching a tree-planting scheme.

The three-time French champion will plant one new tree for every stage he wins in this year's ERC aboard his Citroen C3 Rally2.

Bonato, 37, said: "As a rally driver, you can't lock yourself in a bubble hoping to be able to drive for as long as possible without taking a sustainable approach.

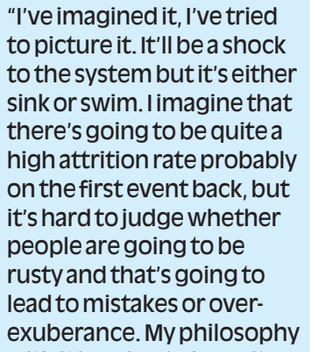
"For several seasons, I have been asking myself the question: 'what can I do?' One stage victory for one tree is a small step for the environment but a big step for our passion."

Bonato will be thinking of the environment in '21

IN THE SERVICE PARK

MATTHEW HIRST

MN grabs a quick chat with BTRDA and Welsh championship regular Matthew Hirst



Hirst: back on stages

It's been seven months since you last competed, have you given rallying much thought since?

"We thought we might as well get the car mint, so it's gone back up to Wayne Sisson at AMS and he's working his magic, getting it pristine. I met with George Lepley at motorway services and gave him some tyres last month for his media day so it was nice to catch up and hear what he's up to."

How do you think the first stage back will feel?

"I've imagined it, I've tried to picture it. It'll be a shock to the system but it's either sink or swim. I imagine that there's going to be quite a high attrition rate probably on the first event back, but it's hard to judge whether people are going to be rusty and that's going to lead to mistakes or over-exuberance. My philosophy with it is going to be quite cautious and build up, find the pace that I'm comfortable with because it would be horrible to write the car off on the first stage back."

Is BTRDA and Welsh events the plan for 2021?

"Yeah absolutely, just do all of it! Whatever's on we'll enter it, immediately. It'll be a race between the co-drivers getting entries!"

You were an avid DiRT Rally 2.0 player in the first lockdown, have you kept that up?

"I did too much DiRT really so I've got into Richard Burns Rally and some of the Czech mods on that, competing in some of the weekly competitions you can find online. Nikolay Gryazin is doing a championship which has been a lot of fun to compete in. The level's just so much higher and actually getting to write your own pacenotes on a game is another level of immersion."

Thorne: frontrunner

THORNE PONDERS HYUNDAI FOR RALLYCROSS BID

Two-time British Rallycross Super1600 champion and Supercar podium finisher Jack Thorne has revealed aspirations to race a Hyundai Supercar in rallycross.

Thorne lifted the British RX Super 1600 spoils in 2014 and 2018. He bought an ex-Olsbergs MSE Ford Fiesta towards the end of 2019 and finished second on his debut in the car at Lydden Hill. He had planned to race in 5 Nations BRX last year before it was decimated by the global health pandemic.

His only competitive outing since 2019 has been in a Hyundai i20 R5 in the Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship round at Donington Park in December, when he was 20th overall after problems with the turbo boost.

Now, though, he has got eyes set on using a Hyundai for rallycross. Thorne said: "We do a lot with Hyundai road cars in our garage and I love them on the road. Now I've got the rally car and I can't describe how that is to drive – it's unreal. I'd love to make something happen where I could use a Hyundai in rallycross.

"The Ford Fiesta is for sale, but [it could be that we] use all the running gear from the OMSE car and put that into a Hyundai bodyshell ourselves to get going."

ASPHALT KING COLE IMPRESSED WITH NEW SKODA AFTER TEST OUTING

Multiple title-winner pleased with new purchase after initial miles in R5-spec machine

Photos: JMS Photographic. Tom Banks, 5 Nations

By Luke Barry

Six-time Asphalt champion Damian Cole got a first taste of his new Skoda Fabia R5 recently at the Bont testing venue in Wales.

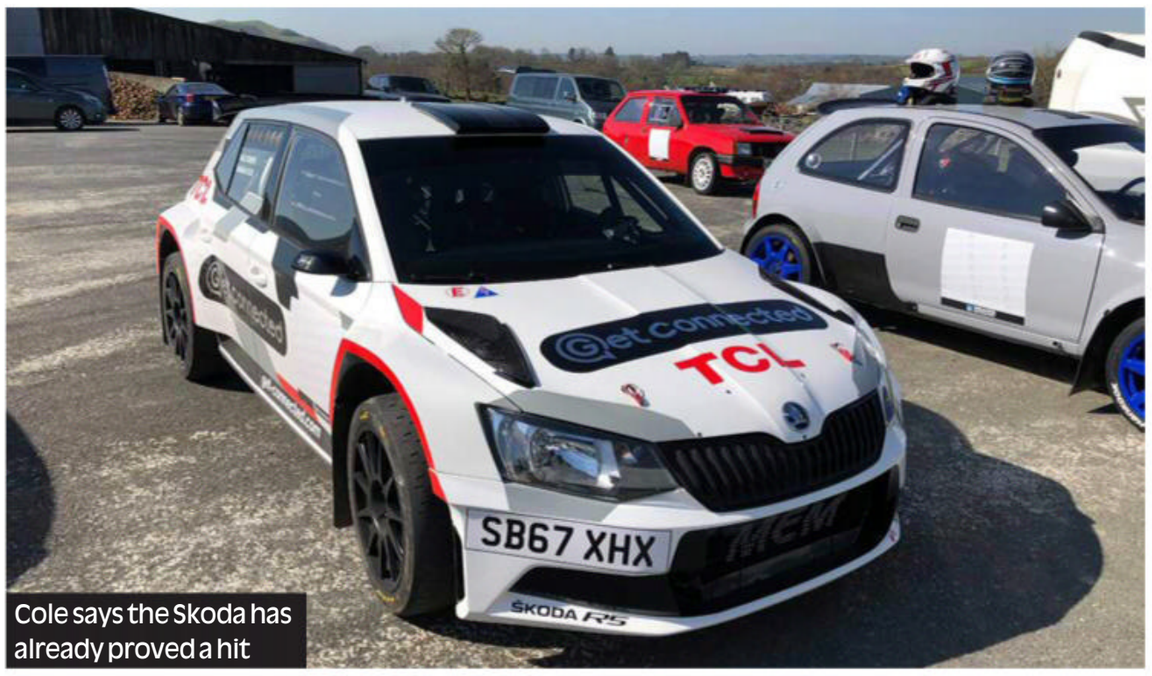
Cole was joined by the likes of Hugh Hunter, Michael O'Brien, Neil Weaver and Richard Wells at the test and told MN he did "quite a bit" of running in his new steed.

He said: "There were people watching, and obviously I didn't see the Skoda going [because he was in it], but pulling out of the tight square-right by the service area and going up the hill, Michael O'Brien's Focus [WRC] looked fast but everybody said the Skoda looked quicker.

"[Dale Bowen, co-driver], he'd been in a Skoda with a 34mm restrictor before because he'd been in Ian Bainbridge's but only on gravel and obviously on gravel you get a lot of wheelspin but he said on Tarmac my Skoda felt as quick as a World car."

Asked if he found it difficult to adjust from a World Rally Car to an R5 like some have previously, Cole said: "It's very easy to drive, much smoother, much more stable than the Fiesta WRC. [There's no] darting all over the road, you're not having to fight it all of the time. We didn't alter anything on it at all, it was just spot on and just everything seems to work as it should."

Cole will mount another title assault in the Asphalt Championship this season when it gets underway with the Mewla Rally on August 29.



Cole says the Skoda has already proved a hit

Anderson has Academy aim

TEENAGER ANDERSON WANTS TO TEST HIMSELF IN BRC

Young Scottish driver Fraser Anderson has become the first driver to sign up for the BRC Academy Trophy as he believes it will prove a real test for drivers who enter the category.

Anderson, 18, has done just three senior rallies in his career but makes the step up to the BRC in a previous-generation Ford Fiesta R2T. The series champion will receive free entries into all Junior BRC rounds in 2022.

Anderson told MN: "BRC has always been the aim really. I was planning to do a good few rounds last year, until Covid took over, in prep for this year. BRC is just the best way to test yourself in my opinion, you're going up against some of the toughest and best stages and drivers in the country.

"The plan initially was to just do JBRC and get as close as possible to the Rally4s but once the Academy was announced I had to take the opportunity. With the Academy, I have a fair shot as the other cars competing will be at a similar level of performance. I will still of course be keeping a close eye on the JBRC guys to gauge my pace.

"This is mainly a year of learning, [but] if the performance is where we want it to be, then I don't see why going for the Academy title would be completely out of the question. But we'll have to wait and see."

SCOTT TO RETURN TO 5 NATIONS BRX COMPETITION

British Rallycross Championship round winner Andy Scott will return to the series this year with his Albatec Racing team's Peugeot 208 Supercar.

He will be joined in competition by his son and grandson. Scott Sr had planned to contest the 5 Nations BRX season last year until the health pandemic significantly reshaped the calendar and curtailed his plans.

This year 2021 he will be joined by son Marc in the RX150 Rallycross championship for single-seater buggies while grandson Finley will tackle the single-make Junior RX class for Suzuki Swifts.

Andy Scott said: "It's been a while since I've competed in rallycross, but I'm very much looking forward to racing against all the familiar names again, and hopefully some new drivers to the 5 Nations Trophy."

Andy Scott made a one-off appearance in the British RX series in 2018, while his team fielded Mark Higgins to the win the title. Marc Scott is a multiple RX150 class champion and has also raced a Supercar for the family team in the World RX when he deputised for Jacques Villeneuve in the Turkish round in 2014.

Andy Scott will rejoin the British RX trail this season

Electric Fiat 500s will have a class in Britain next season

ENTRY-LEVEL ELECTRIC SERIES TO JOIN BRITISH RALLYCROSS

Bosses of the British Rallycross Championship have announced a single-make electric category for entry-level machines which will run alongside the electrically powered cars in the category's leading Supercar class.

The new Electro Rallycross division will feature Fiat 500s prepared by Polish team Elimen Racing. The series is awaiting final approval of its regulations from motorsport's governors, Motorsport UK.

Shirley Gibson, head of Retro Rallycross, is working on the UK coordination, and Elimen expects to field a minimum of five cars for the opening weekend of the campaign. A further three cars will be available for hire.

Electric Fiat 500s were sampled during a test at Lydden Hill in 2019, along with the electric Ford Fiesta developed by the Elimen outfit. The Fiesta was built to take part in an electric class in the Polish Rallycross Championship, which is yet to go ahead.

Three rounds will make up the Electro RX championship in 2021, all at Lydden Hill, accompanying the 5 Nations BRX series. A double-header in May will be followed by another round in November.

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HISTORICS

DOWN THE PUB

ADRIAN WILLMOTT

Recent historic convert
Age: 58 **Lives:** Bath

Willmott: new horizons

He raced in FF1600
"I came from motocross in 1983. I broke my neck and went into racing and won the 1985 Townsend Thoresen Formula Ford championship then got into Formula 3 but budget was a problem and I retired."

He came back at 40
"My company was sponsoring a guy and I went to Donington Park. Jonathan Palmer was there and was a flyer and I used to fly helicopters. I said: 'If you've got a car, I can drive.' I won a race and then did the Palmer Audi championship the next year and won it."

Historics came next
"And then I stopped again until Tom Alexander, a classic car racer and a friend, said I should have a go at historics. That was seven or eight years ago. But I was busy working and then two years ago somebody bought my business. Suddenly, a bit more time was available, and I met Mike and Andrew Jordan. I'd always admired their cars and set-up."

He has the rare Studebaker
"We've now got a good selection of cars. I got the Studebaker, which just makes everybody smile. It's really a Goodwood car as there are not so many changes of direction at Goodwood. In Speedweek last October, Nic Minassian had a second in his race and I won my race so we won overall. So that was a special moment to win at Goodwood."

There is a Bizzarrini coming
"I've got a Bizzarrini that I'm having restored in Italy by the guys that did it in period. That has been a problem because of Covid, and it should have been here last year, but I don't think it's going to be out this year. We might get it out before the end of the year and we really wanted it for the TT at Goodwood. I wanted something different to the Cobra that I had and enjoyed."

He's enjoying historics
"I've also got a Porsche 911 for the Peter Auto 2.0 Cup so the idea is that we do Goodwood and race with Peter Auto and a few races with the other things. What can you not enjoy? Lovely cars, great atmosphere and nice people. I love that experience and I'm introducing some friends to it now, so there could be more cars in the stable yet."

Photos: Paul Lawrence

R.A.C. Rally will appeal with brand-new stages

MASSIVE ROUTE BOOST FOR ROGER ALBERT CLARK EVENT IN 2021

Confirmed outline route to use new stages for Wales-focused rally classic

By Paul Lawrence

Up to 40% of the total competitive route of the 2021 Roger Albert Clark Rally will run in Wales, some of it on special stages never before used in the event's previous 13 editions.

After three days in the north of England and southern Scotland, the epic five-day rally will move to Wales for Sunday and Monday, November 28-29, and the outline route for Wales has been confirmed to help intending competitors plan logistics and accommodation.

The third leg will finish in Carlisle on Saturday evening. Crews will then head to Welshpool where the rally will restart at midday on Sunday for 70 stage miles over world-class forest stages with service in Dolgellau and the end of the leg in Machynlleth on Sunday evening.

The final day of the rally will restart from the Epynt ranges on Monday morning for the concluding 60 stage miles. Exact details of the special stages to be used will be confirmed shortly but what is certain is that this year's Welsh leg will be the biggest so far for this incredible event.

Rally manager Colin Heppenstall said: "We have had many, many enquiries from prospective competitors who are keen to book accommodation in good time. We hope that this information will allow them to continue their planning. The rally will overnight on Saturday in Welshpool and on Sunday night crews will have the option of staying anywhere between Machynlleth and Epynt. This will help spread out the demand for accommodation in an area with few major hotels."

BTCC race-winner Hill was thwarted by a broken clutch

Hill steals the show in Chevron B26

British Touring Car Championship racer Jake Hill was one of the stars at Donington Park over Easter when he raced Simon Watts' Chevron B26 for the first time in the Masters Historic Sports Cars contest.

Hill had tested Watts' newer Endurance Legends Lola but had not driven the 1974 Chevron until qualifying. He shared the car with Roberto Giordanelli in what was effectively his first race in an open top car.

"It's great seat time before the BTCC starts," said Hill. "I really enjoy these cars. It's racing the type of cars I've always dreamt of."

In the race, Hill turned in a fantastic performance and was on target to finish second overall to Tom Bradshaw when the clutch failed late on. "I loved it but I'm so gutted. I fell in love with it when I drove it in qualifying and I hope I get another go," said Hill.

Emberson takes the wheel of the 'chocolate drop'

John Emberson gave the famous Chevron B26 'chocolate drop' its first UK race for several years at Donington Park when he ran the ex-works car in the Masters Historic Sports Car championship.

Raced in period for the works by Brian Redman, Peter Gethin and John Watson, the distinctive brown livery gave the car its name.

Its results included fourth in the World Sportscar championship round at Brands Hatch in 1974 and it later won the British Sportscar championship with Iain McLaren.

"I've had it since August 2019," said Emerson, who also races a Chevron B19. "But I only raced it once at Estoril last year. It's not raced for several years, and it's a great piece of history."

WILDS BACK IN HARNESS FOR A 55TH RACE SEASON

Veteran racer Mike Wilds started his 55th season of racing at Donington Park on Good Friday when he shared the Ginetta G4 of Ron Maydon in the Gentlemen Drivers race.

Wilds, who went all the way to Formula 1 during a full and varied motorsport career, has raced in 55 out of the last 56 seasons, having started at Snetterton in May 1965.

"I've been very lucky," said Wilds, who is now 75 years old. "And it's very, very nice of Ron to let me share his car. We're just having fun."

Unfortunately, the Ginetta retired at the first pitstop after being damaged in early contact.

Wilds (52) was out of luck at Donington Park

IN BRIEF

Extra Donington F1
Two races for Pre '66 Grand Prix cars from the Historic Grand Prix Cars Association have been added to the race line-up of the Donington Historic Festival on May 1-2. With the current uncertainly over travel to Europe and the calendar being impacted by Covid restrictions, the HGPCA has added the popular Donington event to its early season schedule.

Busy for Fowler
Neil Fowler will field no fewer than eight cars at the Historic Sports Car Club Snetterton event this weekend. His team has five cars in Formula Ford 1600, two in Formula Ford 2000 and one in Formula Junior. Among them is multiple race-winner Cam Jackson, who will contest both the Historic and Classic Formula Ford races in his Winkelmann, having sold the Van Diemen RF80 he raced in the Classic championship last year.

Boot focuses on GT
Seasoned historic racer Jamie Boot is going to concentrate on his two GT cars for racing from now on and has put his Chevron B16 up for sale. He has raced the Chevron for 10 years now, having acquired it from Vin Malkie as a continuation car. Originally, it ran with a Mazda engine but it is now fitted with a BMW unit. Boot, who has an E-type and a TVR Griffith, said: "I'll do the Jaguar Challenge and Masters races and I hope to do the Spa Six Hours."

New Prescott series
The Bugatti Owners' Club has announced a new hillclimb competition designed to encourage more two-seater Pre-War Grand Prix cars. The Williams Hillclimb Trophy will run at four Prescott events this year, starting on April 25. The series is named in the memory of William Grover-Williams, who won the first Monaco Grand Prix in 1929 in a Bugatti Type 35.

Duo's European plans
Formula Junior racers Stuart Tizzard and Clinton McCarthy made their Lotus Elan debut at Donington recently in the Gentlemen Drivers race with the ex-Rick Carlino car tended by Jonathan Lewis. They have bought the Elan jointly and plan to share it with trips into Europe when Covid allows. They will both continue to race in Formula Junior as well.

Cobra is unleashed
Chevron B8 racers Charles Allison and Peter Thompson have acquired an AC Cobra and plan to run it in a variety of events. The Cobra is jointly owned by the two Chevron racers. Allison said: "We had a test a couple of weeks ago, and it's definitely different to the B8. But we're pleased with it." They will continue to race their Chevrons in the Guards Trophy.

Advertising enquiries: 01732 446757

FEATURE

RALPH FIRMAN: THE MAN WHO WENT FLYING WITHOUT WINGS

***Matt James** talks to the legendary Van Diemen founder, who shaped junior single-seater racing for more than 30 years and simply can't leave motorsport alone*

Firman reckons his firm has built more than 5000 cars

Although he's not sure of the exact numbers, Ralph Firman thinks that his Van Diemen company created more than 5000 racing cars under his stewardship from 1973 though to 2002, so it is not unfair to claim that he's helped launch 100s of motor racing careers.

Van Diemen was the blue riband manufacturer in the heady days of Formula Ford 1600, which was an intense playground in the 1970s through to the 1990s. The Norfolk firm claimed more than 200 wins in the British Formula Ford category and has lifted the spoils at the end-of-season knockout-style Formula Ford Festival more than 20 times when it was in its pomp. It is a record unmatched by any other constructor.

Not only was Ralph Firman the boss of the company until he sold it to Elan Technologies, he was always at the race meetings, crouching next to the cockpit of a car and taking feedback from its drivers and stretching his engineering grey matter.

Firman was probably more connected with what was happening on the track than any other boss of a car constructor, and the factory-run (and usually Duckhams-coloured) Van Diemen was the plum drive to have in Formula Ford 1600 for almost 30 years. As well as fighting on track, he helped a raft of privateer teams achieve results they might only have dreamt of – it was all good for business.

While Formula Ford was his heartland, Firman's company took a big bite of the cherry when single-make formulas were the new kids in town in the 1990s. Van Diemen built numerous different chassis for overseas markets, branched out into batch builds of Formula First, Multisports sportscars and Formula Palmer Audi. There had been Formula Renault cars and even a Formula 3 machine too.

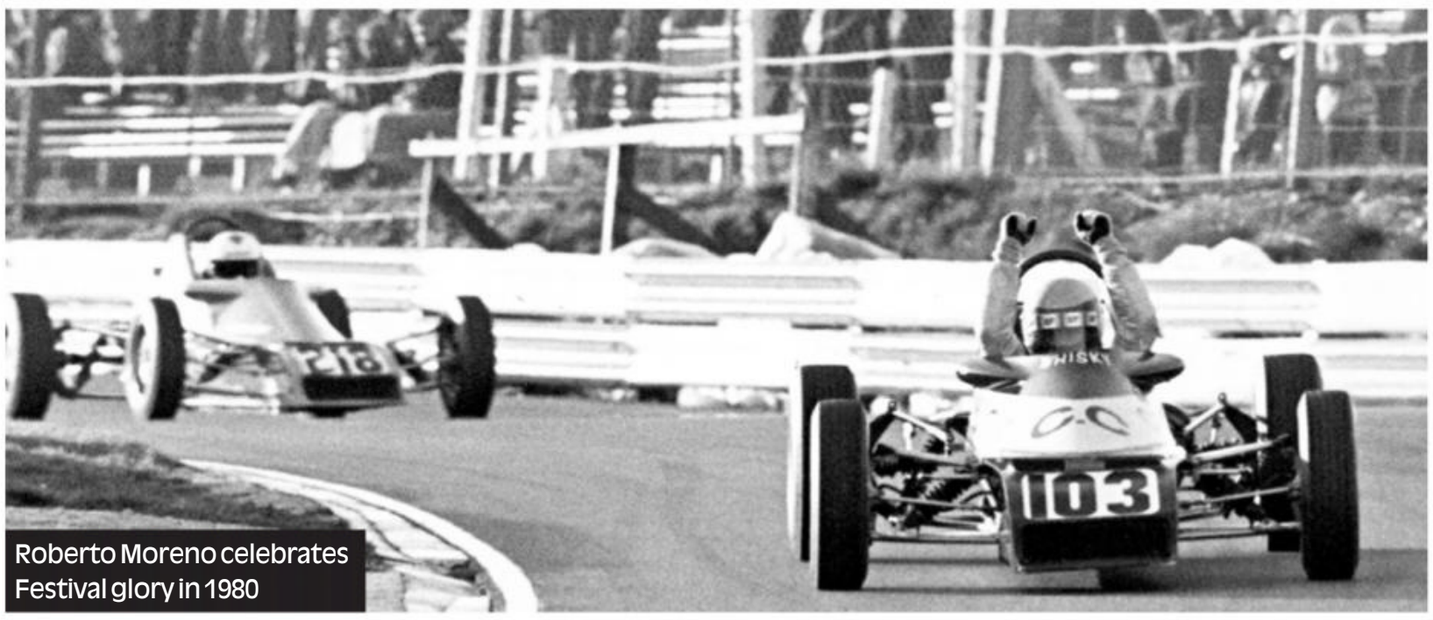
The spark of invention hasn't left Firman and, a few years after selling his firm, he was back in the Formula Ford paddock and his company produced the original BRDC Formula 4 cars. The Ralph Firman Racing legacy continues to shine today in Formula Ford 1600 with the RFR chassis.

Firman took time out of his busy schedule helping racers get ready for the 2021 campaigns to answer the MN readers' questions.

Question: Did you ever want to be a racing driver yourself, or was it all about building the cars for you?
John Charles
Via email
Ralph Firman: "Goodness me, no, I never even thought of it. I figured out very early in my life that I wasn't ever going to be a racer. I always wanted to be a mechanic and deal with that side of it."

Photos: Motorsport Images, Jakob Ebrey

Firman was on the spanners for Fittipaldi (85) in F3 in 1969



Roberto Moreno celebrates Festival glory in 1980

Byrne (c) won the Festival in 1981

MN: So how did the motor racing passion come about? Where was the spark?
RF: "I had two slices of luck, actually. Straight from school, I went to work in a garage: Cattermoles in Ipswich. I used to cycle eight miles there and eight miles back every day. The guvnor, Mr Cattermole, had at least 400 used cars on the books at any one time. They could range from anything from a Rolls-Royce down to a Fiat 500. Back in those days, you would do everything in the workshop, even down to rebuilding an entire engine. We did all sorts of repairs – rusty chassis or the finer nuts and bolts. The foreman there was kind enough to take me under his wing a bit. He used to make sure that he gave me as much variety in the jobs as he could, so I worked on many different areas of all types of cars, which was a brilliant grounding for me. That was the first bit of luck.

"Then the second bit was that my sister, Jennifer, fell in love with [racing driver] Jim Russell. He was running the racing drivers' school at Snetterton. One day, he asked me if I had ever thought about running racing cars. I thought immediately 'well, that sounds a lot cleaner than the job I am doing right now'!

"Jim took me on at the racing school, where our job was to prep all the cars ready for the day's new intake. The cars were based in Downham Market, and we would ferry the cars backwards and forwards from there to do all the work.

"I was lucky again, because Rudy Gates was the chief mechanic at the school. He was a really old-fashioned mechanic. He knew all about the technicalities and the design of the cars. He knew everything. He taught me an awful lot. I was just extremely fortunate.

"Then the school moved to Snetterton and I was lucky once more as I was taken on to be a mechanic for this young up-and-coming driver Emerson Fittipaldi when he was doing Formula 3 [in 1969 when the Brazilian won the MCD Lombard Championship] in a Jim Russell-run car and I also looked after his Formula 2 car for a bit. It was fine and I went on with Jim for a few years before I decided I wanted to run my own workshop and I thought I could get one nearby, so that is what I went and did."
MN: Why did you want to run cars? That is a bit of a leap from being a mechanic…
RF: 'Well, I could see there was more money in it, and I figured there was more to be made than what I would have been earning at the school! When we started out, we did testing work for people that already had cars and we re-prepared them, essentially. Then I got Dave Walker to come along for a fiver a day and test those cars, with the customer there too, to make sure they were OK."
MN: So he was the *first* official Van Diemen works driver…sounds like he was on the books...
RF: "Well, I suppose! He was in Formula 1 at the time, but he was happy of the extra money. That business was all good, but one day I was thinking. Lotus had decided not to build a new Formula Ford car. I had close connections with them because I had built Emerson's F3 car in their development shop so I knew what was going on, and they had decided not to build any production racing cars at all, if you like. So in 1972, I decided it was the right time for me to create my own Formula Ford car.

"This seems like a common theme, but here we go again: another slice of luck. There was a young chap from Canada who had come over to take part in the Jim Russell Racing Drivers School, and he said he would like to drive the car I was building when it was finished. He paid up front for his car [the very first car, the Van Diemen FA73], and a whole season's running budget. That was very helpful…"

Question: Is it true that you invented the jet washer?
James Richardson
Via email
RF: "Not quite! I had a partner in the early days, Ross Ambrose [father of Aussie Supercars champion Marcos]. He had bought a Merlyn F3 car and he was racing it a bit in the early 1970s but when he saw what I was doing, he said he would like to be a part of it. He had his own designs too, but nothing to do with motorsport. He had designed a high-pressure washer machine. It would go on a gantry on garage forecourts with a high-pressure hose, soap suds and all of that kind of thing.

"I thought that was great, because we could make those in the summer while we manufactured racing cars in the winter. Give Ross his dues, he actually got one of these gantries – with 250Psi though it – up and running. But, for whatever reason, after a while it just didn't feel right to me.

"Ross realised that the forecourts [where Ambrose could sell a high-powered car washing machine] didn't operate in the same way as they had Down Under, where he was from. Back in his home, they were all independently run and owned. In the UK, you had to go through Esso or BP to get a slice of the cake. He gave up on it, but he didn't spot the other uses it might have had, like farmers who might want to clean their ploughs and so on."
MN: This leads us to why the very first Van Diemen is called the FA73 [Firman Ambrose], rather than every subsequent car being the RF [Ralph Firman], doesn't it?
RF: "That's correct. It wasn't going to work between us, so we decided to part on good terms. I was on my own from that point, which is why it became the RF designation for the cars. It was a shame we went our separate ways, really because I liked Ross a lot. I ended up running Ross's son, Marcos, in British Formula Ford in 1998, so the circle was complete, I guess.

"It was a great shame that Marcos didn't win the Formula Ford Festival in 1998 for us. He had a good lead, and it was a little circlip that hadn't been fitted in correctly that pulled the bearing out of the gear linkage. I felt very sorry for him."

Question: How important was [Van Diemen designer] Dave Baldwin to your career? Did you ever argue?
Russell Scobbie
Via email
RF: "David was totally important to me. I had known David from my time at Lotus prepping Emerson Fittipaldi's F3 car. He had been working there, and I knew he was good. Van Diemen had a bit of a low when we got to 1976 because Hawke – which was run by Dave Lazenby, again ex-Lotus – created a really good chassis.

"I realised that it was no good to keep on modifying what we already had. We needed something new.

"I went up to meet David, who was working in Lichfield at the time, and we sat there and discussed it until 0300hrs. Eventually, he agreed to come and work with me and help me build a new car.

"He wasn't reluctant but he had already got a job, I think it might have had something to do with Formula 1, but it took him a while to weigh things up.

"We always got on ever so well. We are still good friends now. I asked him to do this one new car for me [for 1977, to fend off Hawke] and when he had, things started to look up – in terms of on the track and for Van Diemen as a whole. I wanted to keep David involved, so I offered him a 10% share in the company to stay with us. He took that on, and that is how we got established, really.

"We were going to build a Formula Atlantic car too at that time, which David was very involved with. But the people in the USA who wanted the car didn't meet the agreement we had made and so we stopped that. That was the point I asked him to come and work for me full-time because we were looking to do other cars that weren't just Formula Ford cars. And he did, he joined.

"I would have input into the designs and have my point of view, but they were his designs, so it was done his way. We would look at things and I would say that I wanted this or that, but then David would point out how much my ideas might cost: so he always won! These are customer cars, after all. I would say that we never had an argument, but we had plenty of discussions. I had plenty of ideas on the mechanical side of things, but he had his ideas too but I never really interfered. The relationship just worked. He worked with us right up until we sold the company,"

Question: Did you know just how good Ayrton Senna was going to be when you ran him in Formula Ford 1600 in the works Van Diemen team in 1981?
James Hilton
Via email
RF: "We had been running Chico Serra,

continued on page 16

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FEATURE

and he kept going on about Ayrton Senna da Silva. I could never pronounce his first name, so we just called him 'Quick Man'. We used to use the Doric restaurant in Attleborough a lot. We took Ayrton in there to do the first deal and he was a tough guy to negotiate with – which I never held against him. We eventually did a deal and I got him in one of my cars."

MN: Did you spot his level of ability from the very first time he sat in one of your cars?

RF: "I suppose I did, I knew he was good, but it took him a couple of races to shake off all the habits he had learned from karting – but that is the same with a lot of drivers. A lot of the drivers expect a car to do what a kart would when they first drive it. It is a traditional problem. They seemed to think that you can barrel into a corner and turn the wheel but with only 100bhp that would kill the momentum of the car. So Ayrton had to get that out of his system, but it didn't take him long. Once he got it, away he went!

"We knew that he was a fantastic driver, but I wouldn't say that we marked him out to go on and become the great champion he was. I wouldn't have been thinking ahead on that."

Question: How disappointed were you that Ayrton Senna walked away from the Formula Ford Festival in 1981? He could have won it in one of your cars...
Jon Wood
Via email

RF: "He had a bit of a personal problem and he went back to Brazil, and that was why he missed the Formula Ford Festival in October

"At the end of the season, he said he would let me know on a specific date whether or not he would come back over to take part in the Formula Ford Festival. He said 'well, you didn't contract me for that event'. I just assumed it would be pretty obvious that he would come back and do it, it never crossed my mind that he wouldn't. As the event got closer, I started to get a bit panicky and I don't know why I never built another car, just to be on the safe side. I hadn't heard from Senna, and so I asked Tommy Byrne if he would like to do the Festival in that car.

"On the very day that Ayrton has said he would be in touch, he phoned me to tell me he was at the airport ready to come over and do the Festival. I had a problem! I had to tell him that I had already offered the car to Byrne and I didn't need him. I don't think he was angry.

"But then, a few weeks later in early January, he phoned again and said 'Ralph, I want to do Formula Ford 2000 in 1982'. So that time I told him to get on the plane, come over and we would talk about it."

MN: In Mark Hughes's Tommy Byrne book, Tommy says there was a bit of needle between him and Senna because Ayrton accused him of stealing his Festival drive…

RF: "Well, if anything that was my fault. If I had waited until the very day that Ayrton said he would be in touch, then he would have been in the car at Brands Hatch. I had to make sure I was covered for the Formula Ford Festival."

Question: What qualities did you look for in a young driver? Apart from enough budget, obviously…
Malcolm Munt
Via email

RF: "You would obviously assess his driving, but the attitude towards it was also important. Put it another way, once or twice – or maybe 10 times! – a young driver would come along and declare that they wanted to drive for my team. I would ask them how many races they had won and they'd turn around and say 'none yet, but I have never had a spin or a crash'. I would straight away say 'thanks for coming along but that is the end of the conversation, goodbye'. That showed me that they clearly weren't trying hard enough."

MN: You often had two or three of the season's best talents in the works Van Diemen team. Was the man management difficult?

RF: "There was one or two incidents but it wasn't about rows so much. Take [Mexican racer] Alfonso Toledano, for example. I mean he was good, very good, but it was just unfortunate that he was in Formula Ford 1600 at the same time as Ayrton Senna [1981]. His mother came over with his lawyer and they wanted to know why Alfie wasn't winning. I said to Alfie and his mother and the legal guy, 'look, what you should do is just learn from Ayrton. You are good and quick, but you are probably lacking a little bit in completeness as a driver and thinking things through, and you can learn that from Senna'.

"They went away and they weren't very happy with that, but about four or five years later, they came to see me at the workshop. They had bought me a lovely glass replica of a Ferrari road car and they said they were there to apologise and they'd understood what I had been on about all those years beforehand. It was a lovely touch."

Question: There seemed to be some animosity between Van Diemen, Swift and Reynard in the 1980s in terms of trying to be the top dog in terms of chassis. Was it hammed up in the press? Or was it real?
Russell Scobbie
Via email

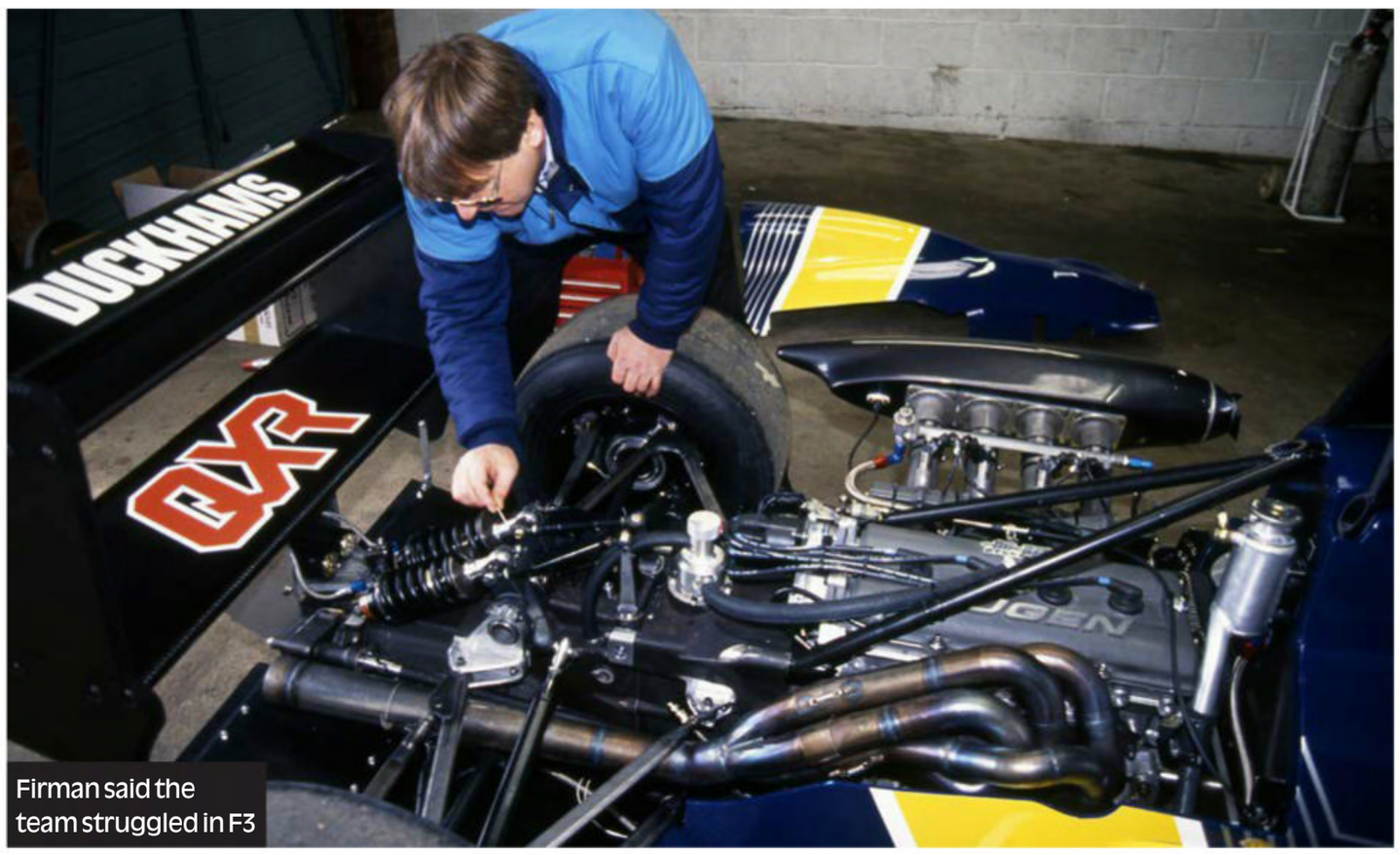
RF: "My philosophy was always to fight like crazy on the track and then we would all share a beer in the bar afterwards. We kept all the battles to the circuit, but we were friends away from that. I always stuck to that, and nothing was ever personal.

"It was intense and stressful on the track though. We were testing, testing, testing all the time like you could do back then, and we were looking for any small advantage to put one over on the other manufacturers.

"But you have to remember, we were fighting for our livings back then. The old adage of win on Sunday, sell on Monday was particularly true for the manufacturers of Formula Ford 1600 chassis."

Question: Which one win are you most proud of?
Danny Roberts
Via email

RF: "I am not much of one for reflection Each win was important, but as soon as the chequered flag has fallen, you are immediately looking ahead an trying to think of ways to win the next one. I never wallow in those things, I have never really thought of it in those terms."



Firman said the team struggled in F3

Mark Webber leads the factory Van Diemen train in 1996

Question: Which was more important to you: was it winning the British Formula Ford title, or was it winning the Formula Ford Festival?
Michael Hills
Via email

RF: "Well both! But the Formula Ford Festival was the thing that went out worldwide. If you won that, then everybody got to hear about it around the globe. The publicity was huge so in my mind, that was the big one. It helped open up the overseas markets to us, so there was no shop window like that."

Question: Which car are you most proud of building?
Graham Lister
Via email

MN: You have always said to MN that you were pleased with the Formula 3 car, which you built for 1992 which Jason Plato and Julian Westwood drove…

RF: "I was proud of that F3 car, but if we just talk about Formula Ford, I was proud of the RF81 in 1981.

"David did a great car there, and the next one would be the 1991 car, the RF91. It is not that the others were bad, but I liked those ones particularly.

"There was also the RF85, which was a really important car for us. I had been over in America the previous year for the Runoffs [the benchmark for up-and-coming talent in the USA], the Swifts had absolutely creamed us. I came straight back to David and I told him that they had taken Formula Ford to a whole new generation. It had its own cast oil tank and they had extended the rear with the gearbox and what-have-you. I knew they had gone way in front of anything we had designed up to that point, so I told David that we had to have a total rework on our cars.

"A friend over there shipped a Swift over to us so David could see what it was all about and then we set to on our version. Some of those design philosophies we carried on using right up to our last designs together.

"So that RF85 was a very important car for us. David worked from 0800hrs until midnight all through the design process. He did the whole lot himself and it turned out to be a great car. It just came out and 'bang', we were in the mix. Then the RF86 had a few more minor changes, and that was a super car, it really got the business going again. I think if we hadn't have gone through all the effort that we did on the RF85 and then the RF86, we would have lost the market. It was that intense."

MN: And the F3 car in 1992? How do you remember that now?

RF: "Well, I think I expected too much from it. I certainly expected too much too soon. The company had some other bothers at the time and I just didn't feel comfortable with the programme. We had [renowned engineer] Andy Thorby working on it to resolve the issues we had, but we weren't getting the results on-track so I said we weren't going to continue with it. We drew line under it."

MN: But that wasn't the first time that you'd been in F3, was it? You had been there in 1975 with a modified GRD chassis…

RF: "That's right. I bought what was left of GRD when it went out of business, and we built six or seven F3 cars. But it [the GRD 375] was an old design anyway, and it needed a total update. It was part of the reason GRD fell over, really – it just wasn't competitive.

"So, for whatever reason, I just never had my heart in Formula 3 really. It was tremendously expensive for what it was and certainly to do it properly. I was more interested in concentrating on the bread and butter part of the business, if you like. That was the thing that was going to guarantee our survival financially."

Question: Did you ever look at building a car for the road?
Nikki Waters
Via email

RF: "Yes I did, and greatly regret that we didn't. That is a plan that I had in my head for the 1990s. We should have done that, but I just decided to keep on going with the racing cars. We had so much going on in the 1980s and 1990s. We had almost cornered the market for junior one-make series.

"While it was purely financial, we were chock-a-block, selling cars to here, there and everywhere, all over the world."

MN: Well, you had things like Formula First, Multisports, Formula Forward – all alongside your existing Formula Ford business…

RF: "[Brands Hatch boss] John Webb had a great vision in where he wanted to go with Brands Hatch and the sport and he wanted saloons, sportscars and single-seaters all Van Diemen manufactured. It was a real shame when [Brands Hatch owner] John Foulston died [in a Thundersports testing accident at Silverstone in 1987] because the impetus got taken away from a lot of things after that.

"I had first talked about a road car to David in the early-1970s, actually. I knew that Lotus was going to stop building the Elan. I asked David about doing a road car then. When we got together a few years later, he wanted to stick to the racing cars. If we had done it, I wouldn't want to have done a kit car. It

"Watching drivers develop was a joy for me"
Ralph Firman

Senna missed out on the Festival

Jan Magnussen on his way to Festival win in '92

Irvine (4) was a driver Firman was proud of

The RF86 was a evolution that put Van Diemen back in front

would have been built in-house by us because then you have the quality control. I have no idea if it would have been a success or not though. It is something I would love to have done."

Question: Which was the driver you ran who you thought was destined for the very top but didn't make it?
Emma Facey
Via email
RF: "I guess Eddie Irvine was one of those drivers. When we took him on, he hadn't done anything really in terms of results. I could see that he was so good, but he was driving a car that was absolutely rubbish and he was preparing himself with his mates.

"I said 'come on, Eddie, let's do it, let's do the British championship'. He said he had no money, but eventually we struck a deal and we did it very, very cheaply. It paid off, because he won the British title and went on to win the Formula Ford Festival in 1987 too."
MN: Is it right that he came and gave you the rest of the budget for that season a few years later?
RF: "He had been racing in Japan at the time and he came along to the Racing Car Show and he put a cheque in my top pocket to level things up with me. I said 'well, thanks Eddie, but what about the interest…?!'

"But he is a good example of a driver who we took who was doing nothing and most other teams would have turned him down flat, but they didn't know the state of the car he was driving before he came to us. The is a nice sense of satisfaction."

Question: Why does FF1600 survive so strongly today?
David Graham
Via email
RF: "It is still going because it is a fantastic formula. It is underpowered, despite what output some people can claim they had been getting from the engine. I had Ford on one day to me and they said they had done some tests on the Kent engine and they couldn't understand all these claims that engine tuners were making about the horsepower they could generate from it. People were saying 110bhp and 120bhp. Ford told us they could only get 98bhp and they had spent weeks on the dyno. I told Ford they were exactly right, there were lots of people making silly claims then about what they could do with a Kent.

"But, the cars in general were underpowered as the chassis kept on getting better and better. The grip was limited, and the power-to-weight ratio was spot on. The best thing about it was, though, that the drivers had to be good to get the most from it."
MN: When you built your cars, did you build them with the customers in mind so that they could work on them easily, or were you solely focused on ultimate performance?
RF: "Whenever we brought a new car out, to get a gauge on how good the car was, I never looked at the front of the pack if we were winning. I looked down the grid to see how well the lesser drivers liked it and how they went. If they were happy with the car, that meant it was easier to drive. They would tend to go quicker. If it was tricky, then they would be further down the order than they should have been with the skills they had got.

"I always studied that, and that would tell me whether we had built a good car or not. You had a rough idea of where you expected the potential superstars to be. That was my judgement."
MN: You had a good relationship with the customer teams to the point where you could almost control the driver market to a degree…
RF: "We would often hold off signing our drivers for the works team and make the decisions about who we should have. Once we had decided, we would then try to put the others into the good teams. We turned down some bloody good drivers due to that.

"But we wanted everyone to have a good chance, and the more stars there were in Van Diemens, the better it was for us on the whole. I used to love seeing the customer teams win races – to me that was great, because it showed that we were doing the whole job properly in building the car and running them. It showed that anyone could win in a Van Diemen."
MN: Was there a driver you turned down that you regret?
RF: "No, not really. We had all kinds of people turning up on our doorstep, some offering to pay us double if their son could get in a factory Van Diemen but I never went for those kinds of deals, ever. We picked whoever we felt we were going to get on with."

Question: Do you look at Formula 4 and its front and rear wings and cringe?
Graham Lister
Via email
RF: "It has never really taken off in a big, big way. Once you put wings on cars you take away from the racing, and you are never going to be able to recreate what Formula Ford 1600 had in its prime.

"That is what keeps Formula Ford 1600 so popular to this day. Formula 4 is more technical. Even when you look back to Formula Ford 2000 – OK, so the Europeans were keen on it – but it never really took off in a big way because it took away some of the magic of the racing without wings." ■

The 1987 design sits proudly on its stand at the Racing Car Show

Ralph Sr, son Ralph on his way to the 1996 F3 title, and Jackie Stewart

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FEATURE

VOLKSWAGEN'S RICH HISTORY IN THE BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

As Matt Edwards prepares to take the VW brand back to the BRC, Luke Barry looks back on the marque's British history that was at its pomp in the F2 days

Alister McRae, here on the RAC Rally, drove a Golf in the BRC in 1997 and 1998

Fighting back from a puncture picked up on the previous stage, reigning British Rally champion Tapio Laukkanen was on a high-speed push in his Volkswagen Golf IV Kit Car over one of the Manx's notorious bumps, got crossed up and rolled out of the contest.

It was a sore end to a bruising 2000 campaign, but little did we know it would be the last time Volkswagen would fight at the front of the British Rally Championship.

Two decades later, the book is about to be reopened as British champion Matt Edwards will bring the brand back to the BRC on next month's Neil Howard Stages as he looks to write a new chapter history with a Polo GTI R5.

"I wouldn't have changed if I didn't feel confident I could do it," Edwards, who has traded an M-Sport Ford Fiesta for the VW, says of his title aspirations. "It's good to be bringing another brand back even if the long-term future of the brand in the R5 category isn't necessarily going to be forever."

VW's rallying journey in the UK began in 1983 when Kalle Grundel powered a Golf GTI to a stunning eighth overall on the RAC Rally but ramped up three years later with the Volkswagen Junior Rally Driver Team.

Four youngsters from each of the home nations – Simon Davison (England), Steve Davies (Wales), Robin Phillips (Northern Ireland) and Callum Guy (Scotland) – were handed works drives in the BRC with the eventual winner, Davison, taking advantage of a prize drive on the 1986 RAC.

But it's the bright yellow, Sony-backed Golf III Kit Car that's perhaps the most iconic VW that graced these shores. Run by SBG Sport – a collaboration between Steve Black and Norman Gault – the team first ran Jimmy McRae on the 1993 RAC before competing in the British championship until 1998 against works teams from Nissan, Ford, Seat, Renault and Vauxhall.

Black tells MN: "We got involved because Norman and I both worked for David Sutton – who rather poignantly and very sadly passed away last week – in 1986 when VW launched their Junior Team and so we had links to VW and to Shell UK with whom we ran a scholarship programme. VW were not involved in the day-to-day running of the programme because it was part-funded. VW let us make proposals to their suppliers and so we managed to persuade Sony to back us. They weren't that interested in us, but the VW contract was a big part of their UK business."

The first driver to complete a full season in an SBG VW was Sebastian Lindholm with a Group A Golf before fellow Finn Tapio Laukkanen and Dom Buckley Jr pedalled the cars in '95. There was an all-Finnish line-up for '96 as Jouko Puhakka joined Laukkanen in the main squad with Ashley Blenkhorn also competing before Alister McRae was persuaded by VW team manager Steve Bagnall to join for the Ulster and RAC Rallies.

> **"The Golf III Kit Car was the best on gravel"**
>
> **Steve Black**

McRae says: "At the end of '95 we'd won the British championship with Nissan. I turned down an offer to continue with Nissan in the hope that we were going to manage to break into WRC with Ford and it didn't happen. So, at the start of '96 I didn't have a programme, and then Steve Bagnall approached me to see if I'd be interested in doing a few events in the VW that year."

Mechanical trouble would rob McRae of a finish in '96, but the 1997 season was where the focus was with the brand-new Golf III Kit Car, built to F2 regulations. McRae won on its BRC debut on the Rally of Wales and doubled up on his home event, the RSAC Scottish Rally, on what was an historic result with Laukkanen tucked behind in second.

"It was the best gravel car," Black says of the Golf. "The Lehman engine was very driveable low-down, but we had the least power compared to the competition. The diff and the dampers were developed by our engineer David Potter so we had tremendous traction. On Tarmac we were never a match for Renault and Ford, though, once they bought along the wide-arched Escort."

It wasn't pace but mechanical drama that would peg McRae back on the Ulster though as a driveshaft broke at the start of the second day, restricting him to fifth in the points. But the Scot still lead into the final round where the famous five-way Manx showdown between McRae, Ford's Gwyndaf Evans, Renault's Robbie Head and Martin Rowe and Nissan's Mark Higgins took place.

"The event started poorly," Black remembers. "Alister had handbrake issues, the windscreen misted up when the rain came, and the steering was struggling through the chicanes. Day two started and we went in the management car to watch mid-stage and we realised quite quickly that Gwyndaf had crashed so our plan was to get to the finish and explain the situation to Alister. We waited and waited and then the news came through that he had stopped..."

McRae had crashed out spectacularly from fifth place, ejecting himself from the title equation. But Volkswagen was still in the frame for manufacturers' honours, and the team had brought along reinforcements in the form of Neil Simpson to help seal the deal.

Simpson tells MN: "I had a huge admiration for Steve Bagnall, and I thought while he was a 'Marmite' character – people were frightened of him; he called a spade a spade – I always found him to be fair, I liked his strategy and I liked the way the car was going. I used to go and see him every year in silly season, knock on his office door and beg him to give me a drive. He used to say 'you're too skinny and you're not fast enough, come back next year'."

But when Volkswagen needed a third driver at short notice, Simpson got the nod. There were limitations though. He had signed a contract with Bagnall that dictated that if Simpson broke the Golf's engine, he'd have to pay the £50,000 replacement cost. But when McRae crashed, Simpson's entry suddenly became vital to the manufacturers' title for VW.

"They needed me to get a result," Simpson says. "Me and Bagnall had a meeting in the motorhome, and he tore up the engine contract and said 'you better get this car into the top five!'"

Simpson finished sixth and, with Laukkanen in third, the title was VW's – its only success in the BRC. Simpson was invited to VW HQ in Hanover as a thank you but what he was offered for the following season didn't meet his expectations. Simpson wouldn't be driving a Golf Kit Car but a diesel TDI instead.

"I was just thinking 'this is going to be a laughing stock'. I drove the car and thought it felt fast but very different because it didn't make the noise the Kit Car made.

"In a Kit Car if you go a bit wide on a corner, you're down the box and you're on the throttle and pulling the car out of the problem. With the TDI you changed up," Simpson adds. "So it was a mental challenge when you're heading for the undergrowth to get off the brakes, change up and press the throttle because it was the torque that pulled you out of the problem. Training yourself to behave in a way that's completely counter-intuitive is a massive challenge."

But despite those reservations, Simpson soon warmed to the car and it culminated in second overall on the 1999 Manx. "I thoroughly enjoyed it: it was just a great rally," he recalls. "There were people hanging out the hedges cheering you on because it was so different.

"In the service area you couldn't get near us, there was just absolute frenzy around the whole thing it was fantastic. And it was quick. I was told by [chief engineer] Karl Heinz Goldstein 'don't go off the feeling, go off the clock' and that was absolutely it."

The petrol Golfs were still performing handsomely too. McRae was the focal

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, mcklein-imagedatabase.com, Motorsport Images,

Simpson had to learn a new style of driving with diesel Golf

VW's last win came with Tapio Laukannen in 2000 season

point of SBG Sport and the Golf III's final year in '98 as he started several World events including a win on Rally Finland against natives such as Toni Gardemeister.

"People said 'you'll not do it,'" recalls McRae. "So for me, to go to Finland with SBG, a small team out of the UK, and beat the Finns in their own backyard: that's one of the stand-out moments with the Volkswagen."

Things changed in 1999. McRae moved to Hyundai in the WRC, Laukkanen had already replaced Head at Renault the previous year and VW Motorsport took over its UK rallying entry. SBG Sport's time with the programme was over, and a brand-new car was developed: the Golf IV Kit Car. The man entrusted to drive it was Mark Higgins alongside VW's test driver Raimund Baumschlager.

"The car got better," Higgins tells MN. "At the end of the year we won the F2 World championship round on the RAC with the car, so things were coming good towards the end of the year, but we just didn't get on top of it until too late. I knew straight away that it wasn't a Nissan Sunny when I drove it for the first time but they developed it. This car was very much a German car as opposed to what they'd had before with Alister when it had been done by SBG."

It wouldn't be a vintage year for Higgins who managed just two podiums all year to finish sixth in the standings before being lured away by a more attractive offer from Vauxhall. "We'd made it [the Golf] the best we could but then when I got in the Astra there was quite a difference," Higgins admits. "I never felt comfortable but, on the other hand, it was a great year. I enjoyed the team and working with Steve."

The year 2000 would be VW's last in the BRC's premier class as the Formula 2 rules fizzled out. Laukkanen returned to drive in a one-car team but there'd be no final hurrah for VW – the titles going to Vauxhall and privateer Marko Ipatti.

The brand remained in British rallying at lower levels thereafter, running a Polo S1600 for new VW test driver Simpson and then David Higgins in the makeshift Formula Rally before operating a one-make series for Group N Polos in the early 2000s.

But a VW has never won a BRC round since Laukkanen's sole victory of 2000 on the Scottish Rally. Just 11 days shy of 21 years afterwards, Edwards will be gunning to put that right. With his and Volkswagen's BRC pedigree, few will be betting against it. ■

HOW THE GERMAN FIRM GRABBED ALL THE WRC GLORY

November 23, 2011 was the day the landscape of the World Rally Championship as Sebastien Ogier confirmed he was joining up with Volkswagen for its nascent attack on the top-flight of the discipline, which blasted into life in 2013. November 2, 2016 was the day the competition was spared as the German firm announced it was withdrawing from the main spotlight.

In snaring Sebastien Ogier from Citroen back in 2011, Volkswagen signed arguably the most promising driver in the world. Four drivers and manufacturers titles were the result before VW abruptly pulled out of the WRC in the wake of the company's diesel emissions scandal.

VW's tenure was short, but definitely left a lasting legacy. The Polo R WRC won 43 of the 52 rallies it started (which equates to a startling 82.7%) with Ogier grabbing 31 of them. Team-mates Jari-Matti Latvala and Andreas Mikkelsen scooped nine and three respectively.

VW has actually won 44 World rallies though as Swede Kenneth Eriksson grabbed a sensational victory on the 1987 Rallye Cote d'Ivoire in his front-wheel drive, Group A Volkswagen Golf II GTI. Volkswagen Motorsport disbanded in late 2020 but not before the birth of the Polo GTI R5 that got its debut in the hands of then VW World Rallycross driver Petter Solberg in 2018.

Its biggest successes have come in the hands of Petter's son Oliver, but it also won the most recent round of the WRC2 series – Arctic Rally Finland – in Esapekka Lappi's hands.

Ogier and Volkswagen mopped up on the World Rally scene

When SBG landed backing from Sony, the Golfs became memorable

Mark Higgins says the 1999 VW improved as year went on

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FEATURE

Qualifying for the World Final was a highlight – so far

The teenager has turned heads in his short career

THE COOKE REPORT:
A YOUNG HOT ROD DRIVER IN A HURRY

The teenager has already shown his potential on short ovals of the UK. By Graham Brown

Followers of oval racing with long enough memories who saw Perry Cooke's first outings in 2016 would have immediately twigged that here was a guy who meant business.

The Junior Rod Vauxhall Nova looked the spitting image of his dad Mel's championship-winning Toyota Starlet Stock Rod of 25 years earlier, was running under the same number and drivers named Cooke who hail from Norwich have never been anything other than committed.

Jump forward two years and the 16-year-old Cooke was lining up for his first National Hot Rod start. He was strapped into the Vauxhall Tigra that had won the World Final four years earlier.

His dues still had to be paid as any rookie entrant has to run their first three meetings from the back of the grid. But, even from there, the potential was obvious; the newbie was more than able to keep up.

Come the day of his first 'proper' start at Hednesford's 2019 season opener and the pressure was really on. He could have won the first heat but got taken out on the last lap. Cooke then went out and won heat two.

When the circus moved on to Skegness, a track he had never driven on, two more heat wins were bagged, followed by a fourth in the final. Another win came at the next Hednesford; expectations were definitely being met. But a couple of seasons in Junior Rods were not solely responsible for what was clearly an old head sat on young shoulders.

"It all started when I was eight years old and my dad asked what I wanted to do for my party and recommended karting," Cooke explains.

"I enjoyed that so much we started racing Cadets at Ellough Park Raceway Beccles and did that for a couple of years. Then my dad suggested we try Super One, which was really good fun. We went all over the UK and finished about 20th in the championship, which was all good experience. But, by the age of 13 I'd really had enough of karting. I got bored! I asked my dad if there was anything else I could do with closer racing, and so he introduced me to oval racing.

"At that time I didn't know anything about my dad's history in it. I knew he'd won trophies but I had no idea what for. I think he actually wanted to steer me away from it and down the karting route and maybe into F3. And he had sort-of sworn off oval racing. He explained to me that it's like a drug; once you start you can't stop and that's why he'd turned his back on it to concentrate on work and his family.

"He took me to Swaffham to see a meeting. I couldn't believe how close they were racing and running side by side. I said, 'how on earth are you supposed to get past people?' On a circuit, it's a lot different. People run wide and you can get under them, or you can plan your pass for three or four corners. I couldn't see how you could pass anyone on an oval. My dad just said, 'you'll find a way'."

Cooke Jr's stepping-off point was a Junior Rod, built with the help of former racer Carl Pye. After an initial outing at Swaffham, the Spedeworth-run Junior category was his destination. The pace was immediate and he claimed the title in 2017. With his sights set on the stars, Cooke Jr and his dad cooked up a plan to get him straight into National Hot Rods.

The only problem was that at this point, Cooke was not old enough to hold a NHR licence, although this did not stop them laying the foundations for it to happen.

Perry explains: "Jamie [Bryant] of JB Racing Engine told my dad there could be a National [car] coming up for sale that we should have, but he warned us it would only be for sale to 'the right buyer'. It turned out to be Shane Murphy's car, a real one-time buy thing. It was very quick then and it still is, and we learnt a lot from Shane.

> **"I'm not going anywhere: I'm happy"**
>
> **Perry Cooke**

"We did do quite a lot of testing with it at Swaffham. When I first got in it, it was like, 'wow, this is quick!' I was lucky in some ways because, having done karting, I was used to rear-wheel drive. I was used to the tail coming out a bit."

Finally the day came when Perry was allowed a licence and all that groundwork was put into practice when the team headed to Ipswich for its NHR debut.

"I had to start at the back and I remember hanging on the outside of Shaun Taylor in my first race, and when I came back I was just grinning, and that carried on throughout the whole meeting – I just loved it so much," remembers Cooke. "There is no way I can express the feeling of going around the outside of somebody in a National. I was just hooked straight away.

"I did progress fairly slowly to start with. I didn't want to rush things. Right from the outset in oval racing, I said I just wanted to have fun with it. We even try to have a laugh when we crash, because sitting there sulking about it won't help."

Despite being forced to start his NHR career part way through a season, Cooke's early success soon had him on track for a possible World Final qualification at his first attempt. Having got that far he might even have had a shot – however long – at breaking Ian McKellar's long-standing 'youngest ever winner' record.

"We never thought we'd make it. We only really did about 10 meetings and only took points from about eight of them. We knew right from the start we were going to struggle to qualify because the season was well underway. If we qualified it'd be a bonus, and if we didn't, well there was always the last chance races.

"But then we were lucky enough to qualify. We were happy with that, and I was proud of us reaching that stage. But then I was fifth fastest in first practice and people were saying 'he's flying' and then someone said I'd be the youngest ever World champion. And that all got to my head... and I panicked. I remember overshooting a corner and I ended up 24th on the grid.

"So then it became all about getting 75 laps under my belt, just finishing was the goal because the first 10 laps, they're wild. For the first 50 laps it felt completely OK and then the tail started coming out and I was washing out wide – but I noticed everyone was doing that – all the cars go off at the same time. I did realise that you don't have to try and win it on the first corner or the first lap. You can sit back a bit and see what happens, that's the beauty of it [the much longer race].

"I finished 13th; I couldn't believe I was right behind Gary Woolsey."

Photos: mkpics.net

Cooke (524) gunning for the line in Junior Rods

Cooke's first motor racing steps were taken on the karting circuits

Teenager Cooke hit the ground running in his ex-Shane Murphy car

Music was my first love....

People who know nothing about motorsport may still have heard the name Perry Cooke. As a multi-talented musician (he plays guitar and piano) and singer, the teenager won numerous talent-show competitions before reaching the semi-final stages of The Voice Kids in 2017.

He explains: "My school advised me to learn an instrument and I decided on the guitar. I didn't have a great voice, but my grandad Kenny loved to hear me sing. Unfortunately he got cancer and passed away when I was eight. I decided to raise some money for the cancer charity (Norfolk & Norwich Cancer Trust) because they were brilliant and must have extended his life by more than a year. That developed into an annual fundraiser in his memory and so far we've raised over £35,000 for the trust.

"I still love my music just not quite as much, my passion now is racing and you can't do both. But having gone through The Voice, it was a case of, been there and done that. I was very happy to get on as more than 25,000 kids auditioned, whittled down to 200, then the last 12. I was mentored by will.i.am and he invited us to work in his studio to record a song from scratch, although it was never released. It was a great experience.

"I don't plan to take it any more seriously. In the music industry you can sacrifice your whole life to make it and get a lot of money or you disappear and no-one ever hears of you again."

Star: Cooke has talents

A World Final win is one on Cooke's wish list, but he has ambitions that go way beyond that.

"I would like to win a major title, which hopefully will come with experience," he explains, "But a faraway goal, which I don't think would ever happen, would be to win the World Final five times. I should probably show a bit less confidence shouldn't I? But I want to aim high.

"It's only really since that World Final onwards that I've started to make ground and picked my feet up a bit, and know where I'm going with the car now."

As a driver who started out driving road courses and has now shown a talent for surviving in close-quarter saloon car racing, one could be forgiven for thinking that Cooke's long-term ambitions might well lie in something like the British Touring Car Championship.

"I'm not going anywhere, I'm happy," he declares. "As long as I race this is where I'd like to be. I don't imagine going into any other formula but if I did, it would probably only be 2.0 Hot Rods, and then I'd do both."

Cooke's concentration on the style of driving required to be very good at just the one class is perhaps enhanced by the fact that he is not greatly distracted by considerations about car set-up. As he explained, this is not really his department.

"To begin with, the car was still set up for Shane [Murphy] and Tipperary, which wasn't a bad place to be starting from," he explains. "We know that Tipperary is a big track and we soon realised that the car was well suited for Hednesford, Ipswich and the bigger tracks. But now we also have the new car which is better set-up for places like Yarmouth and Aldershot. In fact my first time out with it was at Yarmouth, where I won the final.

"That car is still 'there' at the end of the race, it does conserve the tyres very well. I know it's set up to turn right but it just does – it just wants to go round corners. As to how that's achieved, I wouldn't know. I don't have much to do with it as, unfortunately, I don't know much about the car or how to set it up. I can tell my dad and my mechanic Gary if I think it's pushing or something and ask if we can adjust it, so at least I know how the car handles. I'm known as the cleaner. After every meeting I come in with the hoover and pick up all the dirt and stones out of the chassis – and they just laugh at me."

The number of similarities between Perry Cooke and that other much earlier wunderkind of National Hot Rod racing, Ian McKellar Jr, are remarkable.

Twenty five years ago, McKellar Jr had a car with a great pedigree and substantial backing, but at first really didn't know much about the technical side of things. Luckily he had a mechanic who did – Bert Taylor. It was a combination that carried McKellar to a World championship; maybe it can do the same for Perry Cooke. ■

Big pace on an oval: It's in the genes

The founder of the Norwich Cooke racing dynasty – Kenny – started out racing in Spedeworth's Saloon Stock Cars in the early 1970s.

He recorded his first win as a white-graded novice at Yarmouth in August 1971 – indeed all three of the Cooke family racers have taken wins at Caister Road. Ken became a prolific winner in Stock Rods too when they came along, before switching to Hot Rods. He is often remembered for running ex-Barry Lee cars, including a former 351 Ford Escort RS and the infamous ex-works Opel. After he hung up his helmet he went on to be a well-respected steward at the East Anglian raceways.

Kenny's son Mel was also racing by 1978, taking his first Stock Rod win in July of that year. He moved into Nationals and kept on winning, including the Wimbledon-staged BP final in 1986. But Mel enjoyed Stock Rods more, returning to the class and becoming one of the men to beat, claiming the World crown in 1988 and 1990.

That 1990 victory at Buxton was a classic which featured a nail-biting battle for the lead throughout the 50 laps between Cooke and Perry Clack. Although Cooke got over the line first, he always acknowledged that Clack had been the quicker man and his son is in fact named after his gallant opponent that day.

Coincidentally, when Buxton returned to the NHR tour in 2019 it was 29 years to the day since Mel won that World Final there. It was only fitting that Perry was on the grid, even if he didn't manage to pull out a win from somewhere.

Kenny (second left) and young Mel Cooke (second right)

Advertising enquiries: 01732 446757

RACING REPORTS

Photo: Mick Walker

DONINGTON PARK: MSVR BY PETER SCHERER — APRIL 10-11

The Nearys were on fine form at Donington

RACE WINNERS

GT Cup
Race 1: Richard Neary (Mercedes AMG GT3); **Race 2:** Michael Igoe/Phil Keen (Lamborghini Huracan); **Race 3:** Sam Neary; **Race 4:** Richard Neary/Sam Neary

Clubmans Sports Prototype
Race 1: Clive Wood (Mallock Mk23); **Race 2:** Steve Dickens (Mallock Mk29)

Porsche Club
Races 1&2: Mark McAleer (Porsche 997 C2S)

Monoposto F3, 1400, Classic and 1800
Race 1: Lee Fern (Dallara (F301); **Race 2:** Neil Harrison (Dallara F302)

Monoposto M1000, 2000 and 1600
Races 1&2: Dan Gore (Jedi Mk4)

Sports 2000
Races 1&2: Tom Stoten (Gunn TS11)

Trackday Championship
Scott Parkin (VW Golf)

Trackday Trophy
Sam Gay/Colin Tester (Honda Integra)

911 Challenge
Piers Masarati/Miles Masarati (Porsche 911 Turbo)

THREE OUT OF FOUR AIN'T BAD FOR FATHER AND SON IN A MERCEDES

Richard and Sam Neary's Mercedes AMG GT3 claimed three wins from four amid a record entry in the GT Cup opener.

Richard led race one from the start, with Michael Igoe's Lamborghini Huracan taking second from Richard Chamberlain's Porsche after seven laps.

Grahame Tilley's Nissan completed the podium and, with Chamberlain pitting, John Dhillon's Lamborghini was fourth.

In race two, Igoe ousted Neary from the lead of the first Enduro as they plunged down the Craner Curves on the sixth lap. He pitted with his lead intact to hand over to Phil Keen. Keen claimed victory over Stewart/Lewis Proctor's McLaren 750S by over 15 seconds. Abbie Eaton in John Seale's Lamborghini fended off Will Tregurtha in the Tilley Nissan for third.

The Nearys were victorious again in race three with Sam seeing off an early threat from Igoe, who then pitted to retire. Lucky Khera was a solid third in his John Seale Lamborghini, with Tilley third.

Although Igoe ousted Richard Neary from the lead of race four as they entered the chicane just before the pitstop window, Sam emerged from the pits as the new leader to secure win number three. Keen was a comfortable second and Tregurtha reclaimed third from Phil Quaife at the chicane 10 laps from home.

Steve Dickens made a flying start in the first Clubmans race but lost out to Clive Wood at Redgate on the last lap, while Peter Richings came home in third. Despite Wood's late charge, Dickens held on to a lights-to-flag win in race two. Alan Cook followed them home a distant third.

Mark McAleer showed a clean pair of heels to rest of the Porsche Club field, with a double win. Peter Morris took a while to escape from the battling Chris Dyer and Simon Clark in race one but, once free, he reduced McAleer's winning margin considerably.

It was Dyer who headed the chase in race two, while Morris lost third to Clark at the chicane in the final laps.

After clutch failure robbed Neil Harrison of victory in the first Monoposto F3, 1400, Classic & 1800 race, Lee Fern's Dallara took the spoils. At the second attempt, Harrison was to the fore when Fern spun at McLeans.

Dan Gore's Jedi in charge from lights to flag in both races for the Monoposto M1000, 2000 and 1600 pack.

OULTON PARK: CSCC BY MARK PAULSON — APRIL 10

WATKINSON STEERS CLEAR AS SWIFT STARS IN SODDEN SWINGING SIXTIES

Photos: Steve Jones

The Simpsons had to fight back after early contact

Chris Watkinson cut a swathe through the water

A larger engine and wider tyres eventually paid off for Chris Watkinson's Mini in Swinging Sixties, but wet conditions reduced the disadvantage of those running in the Historic tyre class. Mini ace Nick Swift was able to star in the opening stint as a result.

Track limits penalties had dropped him from second to 14th on the grid but he danced his way into the lead by the first corner of lap three. Car owner Giles Page, on his racing debut, wasn't able to maintain that pace but did well to hold onto fifth. Page's sons Jonathan and Matthew were beaten to second by former Mini Se7en men Dan and Charlie Budd, racing an Historic-spec car for the first time. Mark Campbell's Triumph TR5 eased to the Group 2 race victory from the Lotus Europa of Malcolm Johnson and Iain Daniels' Reliant Sabre Six.

Andrew Windmill (Honda Civic) was denied a deserved Tin Tops victory when he copped a 30-second penalty for cutting his pitstop short by 0.5s. Father-and-son Colin and Steve Simpson inherited the win with a fine comeback after a tardy start from pole position and first-lap contact for Simpson Sr. Hampered by a slipping clutch and qualifying interrupted by a failed hub, Martin Addison responded with a determined drive to what became second.

Dave Griffin's BMW M3 kept clear of the action behind for Future/Modern Classics honours, as Alex Taylor (Mazda RX-7) and Stephen Scott-Dunwoodie (Ford Sierra Sapphire Cosworth) collided while disputing second. The TVR Tuscans of Stuart Daburn and Christian Douglas filled the podium, polesitter Daburn benefiting from an earlier safety-car stop.

Appearing again in the New Millennium/Open race, Griffin couldn't live with Mark Smith's Evo version of the BMW M3 E36 but still won the Open section. Mike Nash's Seat Supercopa came through for third as the tricky conditions took their toll on others.

Charlie Newton-Darby topped the Turbo Tin Tops field.

Magnificent Sevens victory went to Stephen Nuttall in dominant fashion after Ben Simmonds' challenge faded following a couple of tangles in traffic. Colin Watson overhauled BOSS team-mate Tim Davis for second, some 50s in arrears.

RACE WINNERS

Swinging Sixties
Group 1: Chris Watkinson (Austin Mini)
Group 2: Mark Campbell (Triumph TR5)

Tin Tops
Colin Simpson/ Steve Simpson (Peugeot 206 RC)

Future Classics/ Modern Classics
Dave Griffin (BMW M3 E36)

New Millennium/ Open/Turbo Tin Tops
Mark Smith (BMW M3 Evo E36)

Magnificent Sevens
Stephen Nuttall (Caterham Supersport)

DONINGTON PARK: 750MC BY MARK PAULSON — APRIL 5

OLD HAIRPIN SLIP-UP DENIES WALKER-HANSELL A DOUBLE IN LOCOST BATTLES

A first-lap error denied Simon Walker-Hansell a deserved Locost double at Donington's 750 Motor Club season opener on Easter Monday.

Polesitter Walker-Hansell outbraked himself at the Melbourne Hairpin and was adjudged to have rejoined the track unsafely when he clipped Greg Smith's car. Walker-Hansell's stirring recovery drive from the lower half of the top 10 to win by nearly three seconds went poorly rewarded as he was demoted to sixth by a penalty. Andrew Tait inherited the win, benefiting from the chaos caused by Geoff Peek's last-lap spin across the track. Walker-Hansell hit back to win race two and outfox Tait.

On his MX-5 Cup debut, ex-British touring car man Mike Epps enjoyed a slugfest with category benchmark Ben Short. The duo dominated race one, trading the lead and some paint, before Short pulled clear after Epps missed a gear. Epps made the best of a frenetic first lap in the partially-reversed grid rematch but was excluded as his car was underweight. That handed Mike Comber the win, completing a fine recovery from a first-bend off in race one, with Short second and Ben Hancy taking his second podium.

Club Enduro champions Carl Swift and Rob Baker made the most of their SEAT Leon Eurocup's fuel tank capacity to pit under an early safety car and thwart the rapid BMW E46 M3 GTR of Joe Lock and Ash Hicklin. Third-placed Chris Boardman impressed in the E36 M3 he shared with Adam Howarth.

Matt Holben's TVR Tuscan triumphed in the All Porsche Trophy and Bernie's V8s, benefiting from a shorter mandatory pitstop than the Porsche Cayman of Jonathan Evans.

With defending Bikesports champion Charles Hall sidelined by differential failure on his Spire in qualifying, his predecessor Joe Stables fended off Scott Mittell's new machine to win both races.

RACE WINNERS

Locost
Race 1: Andrew Tait
Race 2: Simon Walker-Hansell

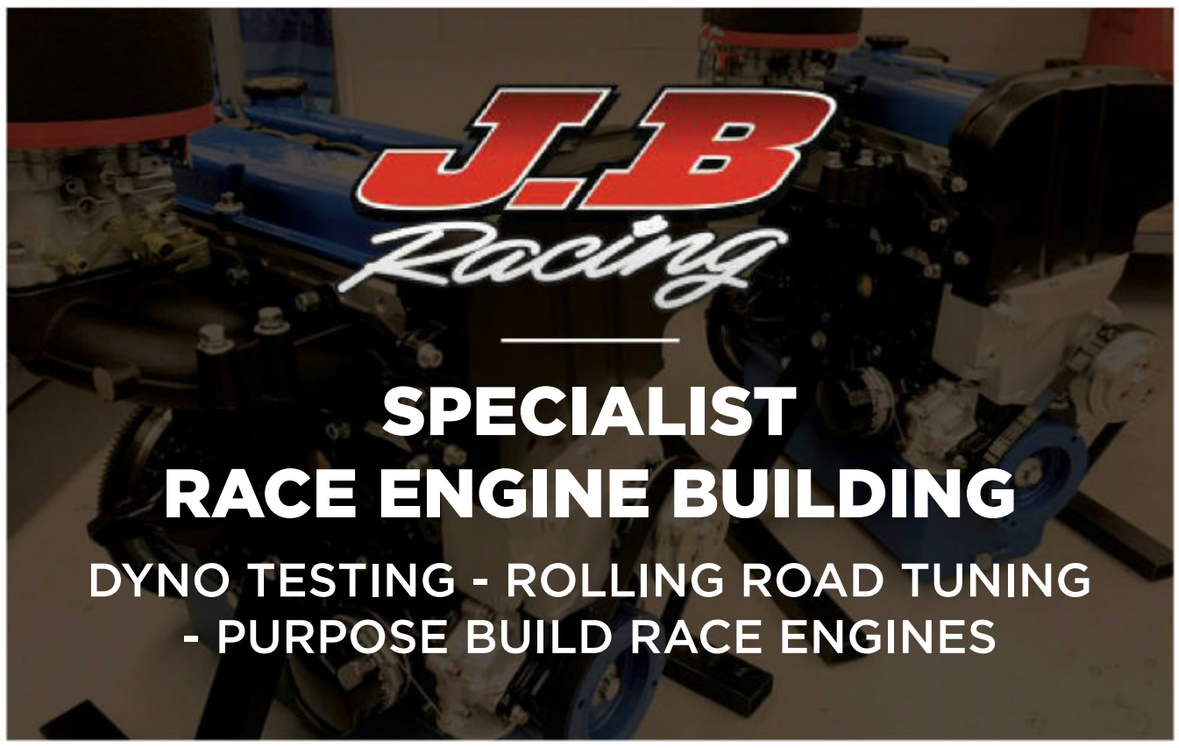
MX-5 Cup
Race 1: Ben Short
Race 2: Mike Comber

Club Enduro
Carl Swift/Rob Baker (SEAT Leon Eurocup)

All Porsche/ Bernie's V8s
Matt Holben (TVR Tuscan)

Bikesports
Races 1&2: Joe Stables (Radical PR6)

GOOD LUCK FOR THE COMING SEASON



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FEATURE

F1'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

James Roberts explains how the new look for Formula 1, set to materialise next season, has tackled some of the category's issues

Formula 1 will get a complete reset in 2022 when a dramatic raft of new technical regulations will alter the shape of the cars (below) in the hope of closer, more exciting racing.

Some onlookers constantly bemoan the complex aerodynamics of F1 machines, which preclude them following too closely which, in turn, militates against overtaking. This has often come under the microscope, but rarely so intensely as now.

That should help shake-up the order, while another overhaul of the way the finances are divided up will mean that the prize pot is spread more evenly. Sporting regulations have come under the spotlight too. No stone has been unturned, and here we find out what it all means.

Wraps came off the new F1 vision at Austin in 2019

NEW: RADICAL-LOOKING CARS

Formula 1 is set for one of the most dramatic overhauls in its 71-year history from next season as futuristic-looking machines with larger wheels and swoopy wings will replace the current generation of car.

With less drag, simplified suspension and a return to ground effect aerodynamics, the design of the 2022 car should transform the category.

Why is this happening? F1's two key objectives are to improve overtaking and make races less predictable.

For the first time, a new set of rules have been written that puts the interest of the fan first.

An aerodynamic working group made up of technical bosses and the teams (who pooled their resources) have been working together to find a solution to the problems of the current generation of car – primarily the difficulty in overtaking.

"When we started this project, we looked at a philosophy which was to improve the entertainment," says Pat Symonds, F1's chief technical officer. "And the new car is the culmination of more research than has ever gone into the design of a future F1 car."

Just as the 2021 season has sprung into life, away from the race track boffins are now furiously working on the next generation of car, based on the plans presented by F1 in October 2019.

Originally the new regulations were slated for this season, but the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic sensibly led the rule-makers to delay their introduction until 2022. Teams also had to take a hiatus on designs until January 1, 2021, so the smaller resourced outfits wouldn't be disadvantaged.

The aerodynamics have been simplified for 2022

The 2022 cars will feature radical changes that will make them less reliant on wings for aerodynamic performance, so they should be easier to race. Eyebrow wings positioned above each of the front wheels will be mandatory to control airflow coming off the tyres, while bargeboards behind the front suspension will be banned.

Front wings are simplified, rear wings are bigger and the floor of the cars will be revised to increase ground effect.

Financial prudence has meant the current 1.6-litre V6 hybrid turbo engines will remain into 2022 and beyond but with development frozen to end the spending war between the manufacturers.

While there will be more standardised parts to save costs, there is wriggle room to allow different concepts and styles to be created so F1 avoids looking like a spec formula.

"We do expect there'll be numerous areas where the cars will look different to each other," says Nikolas Tombazis, the FIA's head of single-seater technical matters.

"The nose, the front wing, the engine intake, the sidepod inlet, the sidepod shape itself, the rear wing: there's quite a lot of areas where we will still see a notable performance and visual differentiation.

"We feel we've taken a huge step towards creating rules that still allow aerodynamicists to be creative," adds Tombazis, "while achieving the key objectives."

Wings will be less complex as downforce comes from under the car

"The new F1 car has had more research than ever"

Pat Symonds

Photos:Motorsport Images

A DRS zone could be rendered useless

CLOSER RACING

For a long time, both fans and drivers have wanted cars that can race more easily. How many times have we seen a driver quickly hunt down a rival only to be slowed down by the dirty air thrown off the car in front?

Following cars often need a pace advantage of 1.5 seconds a lap to be able to challenge to overtake and as the field is so competitive, the common outcome is a procession until tyre life becomes the limiting factor.

If a following car can get close enough, the rear-wing opening Drag Reduction System helps overtaking, but in reality DRS is a sticking plaster over a much bigger problem. While it will continue into 2022, detailed research shows how much the aero issue needed fixing.

"The current generation of cars have a wake that is very damaging for the following car," says Tombazis. "So we have been studying ways in which the wake of the front car can be pushed upwards so when the rear car is following it has a cleaner flow. That involves readdressing all the structures of the aerodynamic flow around the car."

When the current F1 car is running seven car lengths behind another it loses 21% of its overall downforce. At three car lengths that increases to a 32% deficit and at one car length nearly half of its performance is lost by the turbulent air.

By contrast, simulation for the new 2022 chassis predicts a loss of only 2% performance at seven car lengths, increasing only to 6% at three car lengths and just 14% at one car length. This change is primarily through harnessing ground effect more powerfully. Underneath the new car, the diffuser will run from the front of the sidepods to the back with twin venturi tunnels on each side. It will mean the wake of dirty air a car produces will be lifted higher into the air so the car following will be less influenced and can sit closer behind.

Inevitably designers will want to claw as much performance back as they develop their machines, but that isn't too much of a concern to F1's tech chief Pat Symonds.

"Even if they develop the downforce and erode a little [of our efforts] we'll still going to have a car which is much more raceable than the current car," he says.

Plus the introduction of an 18-inch wheel and lower profile tyre has a two-fold effect. The first is to make the cars look more modern (current Formula 2 cars have already made the transition) and secondly, a stiffer sidewall will further simplify the aerodynamic wake coming off the wheels, which should make airflow around the car more manageable.

FAIRER COMPETITION

Since the 1.6-litre hybrid turbo era was introduced in 2014, Mercedes has dominated Formula 1 winning seven consecutive drivers' and constructors' championships.

Of the 139 races since the start of that period, it has won 103 with a winning ratio of 74% (up to and including the 2021 Bahrain Grand Prix). And between 2014 and 2019 only 26 podium places out of a possible 363 were taken by a team other than Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull – who were also the only teams to win a grand prix. One of the aims of the new formula is to be more unpredictable like 2020, when Pierre Gasly won for AlphaTauri at Monza and Sergio Perez was victorious from the tail of the field at the Sakhir Grand Prix.

"The battle between the drivers is what [the fans] really get excited about and they'll be more capable of doing that with these new regulations," says Ross Brawn, F1's managing director of motorsports.

"The cars will be closer, but we'll still have the special teams in F1: Ferrari, Mercedes and Red Bull, but on a good day with the right driver they can be beaten."

The promoters of the sport still want to retain the integrity of grand prix racing so the best driver-team combination clinches the championship, so it won't become a lottery and gimmicks such as reverse grids have been shunned. But a race victory must be less predictable as the bigger teams are pegged back.

"Budgets have been escalating," says Brawn. "F1 is almost a victim of its own success in that the rewards of victory are so valuable that the justification for investment keeps coming."

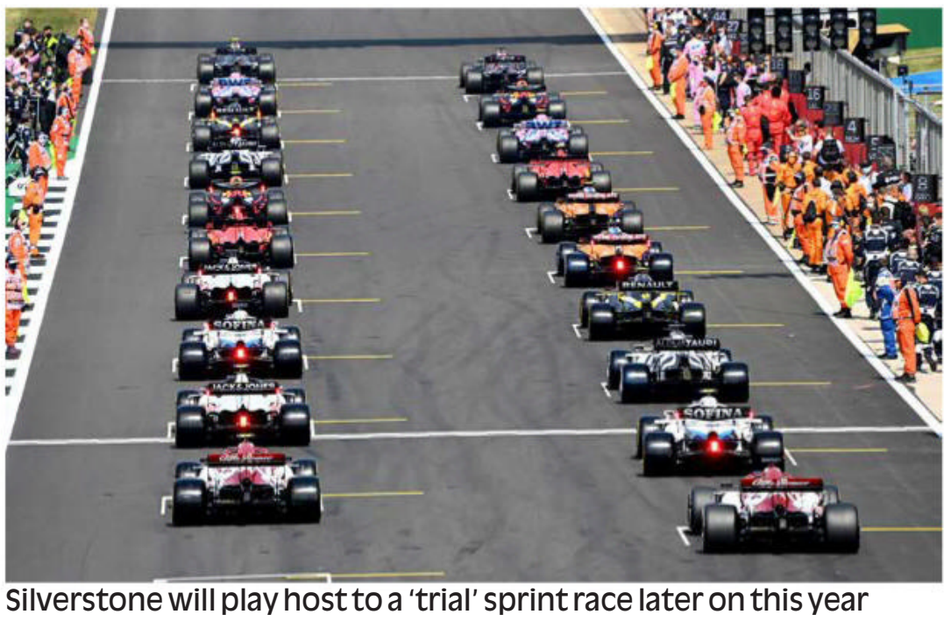
To solve this conundrum there is now a fairer distribution of prize money, costs have been lowered and as of this year a budget cap has been introduced. Any breach of spending will result in severe sporting penalties that could mean a loss of points or even exclusion from the championship. The financial impact of the pandemic has meant the originally proposed $175million a year cap has been reduced to $145m for 2021 and will reduce by a further $5m a year for the next two seasons.

The budget cap will not cover driver and senior management salaries, but all other aspects will come under close inspection. While fundamental performance differentiators must still be made by the teams themselves, more standardised parts (such as fuel pumps) or prescribed designs (wheel covers) will be introduced to help with costs. Certain components must now last longer and there will be an expansion for independent teams to acquire parts from other outfits.

Windtunnel time has also been cut to encourage more development in CFD [Computational Fluid Dynamics] in addition to a rule whereby development time increases the further down the points pecking order a team sits. This season last placed Williams will get 112.5% more development time than champion Mercedes (which gets 90% of the maximum time allowed). All of these moves are aimed at levelling the playing field to make F1 a fairer contest for every competitor.

Wins like Gasly's at Monza last year will be more likely

MORE RACES, SHORTER WEEKENDS


Silverstone will play host to a 'trial' sprint race later on this year

While reversed grids will not be introduced to shake-up the order, there is support for the new 'sprint qualifying' format, which could expand into 2022 if the three trial Saturday races in 2021 to determine the grid prove popular.

Other plans for 2022 include an expansion to 25 races but a reduction in activity from four to three days.

This means teams will arrive one day later and all media and sponsor work will take place on Friday morning (rather than on Thursday) followed by two one-hour practice sessions on Friday afternoon.

One of the biggest changes for 2022 will be a 'run-what-ya-brung' philosophy to the weekend. Cars will be scruntineered on Friday morning and that specification must be raced. Teams can still bring upgrades to test, such as a revised front wing, but they can only be run in Friday practice and all cars must return to their race spec on Saturday morning. It's to avoid multiple iterations of wings being built.

In addition teams must run two practice sessions in the year with a driver who has competed in two grands prix or fewer, to allow more chance for younger racers to get behind the wheel. Every team must follow this policy, so they'll be opportunities for between 10 and 20 young drivers to showcase their talents in the public eye.

> **"Fans want to see a drivers' battle"**
>
> **Ross Brawn**

There are further changes to address sustainability, by increasing the bio-content element of the fuel, phasing out tyre blankets and ensuring circuits reduce their use of plastics. The changes to the cars, with enhanced safety absorption, prescribed parts and larger wheels will take their overall weight up by 25kg to 768kg. In conjunction with the reduced aero, speeds of next year's machines are predicted to be three seconds a lap slower. But with a closer, more competitive field racing cars able to overtake, who will notice?

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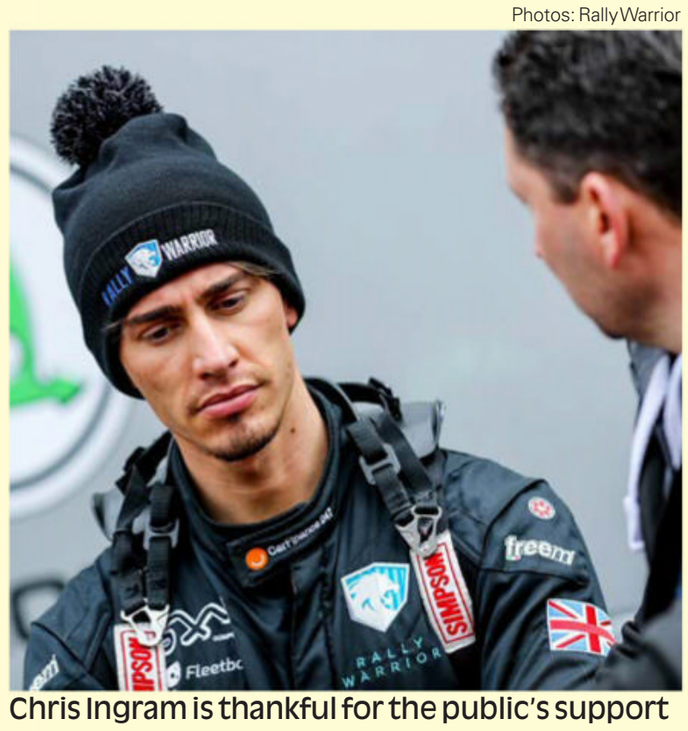
COLUMNIST

CHRIS INGRAM

British rally driver who will be starting out on a two-year WRC journey

Photos: RallyWarrior

Ingram has already been testing in France



Chris Ingram is thankful for the public's support

When the World Rally Championship calendar for this year came out I thought there would be no way I'd be heading to Croatia next week for the third round of the WRC.

But thanks to some incredible support, massive commitment from so many people and a lot of hard work, my co-driver Ross Whittock and I will be starting what we hope will be an amazing adventure in the WRC.

To say this means the world to me is a massive understatement and I'm so fortunate. When you grow up in a country that produced Richard Burns and Colin McRae, two of the best rally drivers that ever lived, it's a massive source of inspiration.

When you've got the kind of passion for rallying that I have you want nothing more than to try to get to the WRC and achieve just a fraction of what they did. Of course, they were World champions and obviously that's the ultimate goal, but it takes time, talent and a phenomenal amount of hard work to get that far.

It also needs financial support and I wouldn't be here without my main sponsor, CarFinance 247. And with SG Financial and Fladgate acting as advisors, my Rally Warrior team has secured additional backing from Protec, Kroon-Oil, Fleetback, WS Transportation, HAH Whisky, Stilo and Freem. I'm so thankful and so grateful for this support. I also want to say thank you to Fred Miclotte and all the team at SXM Competition, who will be running my Skoda Fabia in WRC3.

Although getting a chance in the WRC for one year would have meant the world to me, the fact I've got a two-year programme is vital.

Experience is so important in the WRC, which is so tough and so competitive. And you only get experience by getting to the finish of each event you start. So, in year one, the objective is to keep a calm head, not do anything stupid, learn as much as possible and complete as many kilometres as possible. Points and podiums on top of all that would be a massive bonus, but there's no pressure on me to do that. The only pressure is to get myself in a position where I can go for top results in year two.

I'm totally committed, totally determined and I've won two of the main titles below WRC level. I have sacrificed everything personally to be able to chase my rally dreams. It has been a challenging road to say the least just to get to this point. We had to launch a crowdfunding bid just so Ross and I could get to the final rounds of our European championship-winning season, but thankfully we made it and lifted the trophy.

I train hard and push myself to be the best that I can be and I am so grateful the people who have helped me to get this far.

I achieved a dream when I became European champion. However, competing against some of the fastest rally drivers on some of Europe's most dangerous roads wasn't the challenging part. I was struggling, fighting and overcoming a much harder battle with my own mental health. That's why I've used my social media channels to promote HUMEN, The Men's Mental Health Movement.

Whittock (left) and Ingram are ready for 2021

I hope that by being open about my challenges it will help other men to get talking. I have struggled with hard times in my personal life. I became very depressed when everything hit me all at once, financial pressures, relationships, family illnesses and the thought I couldn't continue my career.

Going home just a few days after each rally and even after winning the ERC in Hungary, I would get so depressed with my personal life and sink into a very dark place, as I didn't seek help. Men should talk.

Although this year is all about learning, I can't forget that, apart from the testing we managed last week, I've not driven a powerful rally car in competition since November 2019 and that was in very wet, cold and muddy conditions.

All the events I'm planning to do will be new for me, it's a new team and I'm up against the best drivers in the world. I know it's not going to be easy but I've never had it easy in my career. I'm looking forward to facing all of the challenges head on as always and I feel confident in the knowledge I have a fantastic team around to support Ross and myself.

I'm going to give it everything I've got, just like I've done throughout my career and thank you again to everybody for the support.

Some of the messages I've received since we announced our programme have been so humbling, but they've also made me realise more than ever the opportunity I have and the support for rallying in my country.

Ross and I will be flying the Union Jack flag with so much pride next week and we really can't wait to get started and do everyone who have helped us proud.

"I am looking forward to all the challenges that lay ahead"

WHAT'S ON

YOUTUBE

Ten years ago on Saturday we had a pivotal point in the career of reigning World Endurance Championship king Mike Conway. He took his first IndyCar victory; he did it at its blue-riband street event, Long Beach, plus it cemented his comeback from injuries from an airborne Indianapolis smash the previous year.

Furthermore, adding to the sense of an astonishing breakthrough, he did it with a late-race surge that made all exclaim: "where did *that* come from?" And this came after dropping to 22nd with a botched pitstop.

With 15 laps left, as all were uncorked from the final yellow, he was sixth. Then Conway started slicing past opponents as if in a video game on easy mode. Dario Franchitti, one of his victims, called it "the Conway express".

Within a lap Conway was second, and on the next lap he was by leader Ryan Briscoe too. Then he streaked clear by a second a lap. It may have owed to circumstance: rivals complained they'd lost grip on 'marbles'. Whatever was the case, it looked impressive and Conway didn't look back either that day or subsequently in his career.

IndyCar's channel has highlights at: youtube.com/watch?v=GrxJ8p7AKb0 or via searching '2011 Long Beach IZOD IndyCar Series Race Highlights'.

Graham Keilloh

Conway was on fire

TV GUIDE

Formula 1 is back this weekend for its second 2021 gathering and, just as seemed to be the case every year when I was a slip of a lad, F1's round two is at Imola. It's the inelegantly titled Emilia Romagna Grand Prix (why don't they call it the San Marino Grand Prix? Yours, a grumpy old man).

Channel 4 has its usual highlights of F1 qualifying at 1930hrs-2100hrs on Saturday then its race highlights are at 1830hrs-2100hrs on Sunday.

And Sky Sports F1 also has its usual suite of programmes. The F1 Show previews the weekend at 1700hrs-1800hrs today (Thursday), then it's shown thrice more this evening and again tomorrow morning. Plus if you're so inclined you also can check out the F1 drivers' weekend preview press conference today at 1300hrs-1635hrs, again on Sky Sports F1.

And switching to review mode there are Ted Kravitz's F1 notebooks. The qualifying rundown is shown on Saturday at 2100hrs-2130hrs and the race one on Sunday at 1700hrs-1730hrs. Both also are repeated several times.

There's something for rally fans with WRC's magazine rounding up news and action. It's on BT Sport 2 on Saturday at 1645hrs-1715hrs then also repeated.

Graham Keilloh

LIVE TV

FORMULA 1 EMILIA ROMAGNA GRAND PRIX IMOLA

- **Practice 1:** Friday, 1000hrs-1145hrs, Sky Sports F1
- **Practice 2:** Friday, 1345hrs-1530hrs, Sky Sports F1
- **Practice 3:** Saturday, 1045hrs-1210hrs, Sky Sports F1
- **Qualifying:** Saturday, 1300hrs-1530hrs, Sky Sports F1
- **Race:** Sunday, 1230hrs-1700hrs, Sky Sports F1

INDYCAR ALABAMA

- **Race:** Sunday, 2000hrs-2300hrs, Sky Sports F1

NASCAR RICHMOND

- **Race:** Sunday, 1930hrs-0000hrs, Premier Sports 2

LISTINGS

SATURDAY

- **Oulton Park, Cheshire**

BARC meeting: Karts, Caterham Graduates, NW Sports/Saloons, RED Sports/Saloons Starts racing from 1140hrs (qualifying from 0845hrs) **NO SPECTATORS**

- **Cadwell Park, Lincs**

750MC meeting: Clio 182, Formula Vee, Toyota MR2, Historic 750 Formula, Hot Hatch, Allcomers Production Sports and Saloon Cars **Starts** racing from 1115hrs (qualifying from 0900hrs) **NO SPECTATORS**

- **Silverstone, Northants**

VSCC meeting: HGPCA, FISCAR, 500cc F3, Vintage races **Starts** racing from 1200hrs (qualifying from 0900hrs) **NO SPECTATORS**

SATURDAY/SUNDAY

- **Snetterton, Norfolk**

HSCC meeting: Heritage FF1600, Ecurie Classic, Classic F3/Classic FF2000, Historic FF2000, Historic FF1600, Classic FF1600, Historic Touring Cars, Historic Road Sports, '70s Road Sports, 80s Production Cars, Classic Clubmans, Formula Junior **Starts** Saturday, racing from 1315hrs (qualifying from 0900hrs) Sunday, racing from 1135hrs (qualifying from 0900hrs) **NO SPECTATORS**

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ART EDITOR MIKE STOKOE'S FAVOURITE OF THE WEEK!

Otto Altenbach, Jurgen Lassig and Pierre Yver's Porsche at Le Mans in '91. By Neil Ormston

Ian Baxendale's Newton Aycliffe BriSCA F1 snap

Supercup muddle in 2010, by Robert Taylor

Spectacular British GT Merc, from Gary Hill

Classics at Capel Manor show, by Robert Taylor

NEXT WEEK — OUT THURSDAY, APRIL 22

**Correct at time of going to press*

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Kelsey Publishing Ltd
Kelsey Media, The Granary, Downs Court
Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone Kent ME18 6AL

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